

**A SEARCH FOR LIFE-GIVING MARRIAGE:
THE *IMBUSA* INITIATION RITE AS A SPACE FOR
CONSTRUCTING WELLBEING AMONG MARRIED
BEMBA WOMEN OF ZAMBIA**

By

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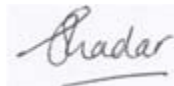
DECLARATION

In accordance with the University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus), and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, it is my original work.

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26 February 2013

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission



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CERTIFICATION

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This is to certify that the abovementioned thesis has been language edited by Dr. Karen Buckenham, an approved language editor for the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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DEDICATION

TO

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

Abstract

This empirical study analyses whether and how the *Imbusa* initiation rite is used to construct 'subordinate femininities' among married Bemba women of Zambia. *Imbusa* initiation rite is very significant for Bemba and Zambian women despite the many changes that have significantly altered their religio-cultural practices. It is something that makes every parent proud of their daughter because it is more or less a public declaration that they have raised their daughter with good morals as understood by Bemba people. This study has used two frameworks, first, African women theologies because African women theologies draw their sources from rites, rituals, songs, proverbs, riddles and so on. Secondly, I used status construction within social psychological theory because those with authority in groups define the outcomes and expectations of their group. For instance, *banacimbusa* among the Bemba people determine what should comprise the teachings in *Imbusa* and how an initiated woman has to behave in marriage. Utilizing mixed methods, the aim was to understand women's views about ways in which the *Imbusa* rite contribute to the identity of Bemba and other Zambian women in marriage. I have proposed a framework for a life-giving marriage; first the need for *banacimbusa* who are gender sensitive in their teachings; second, African feminist *Imbusa* pedagogy, teachings that equip women for dialogue in marriage. And third, a holistic approach to sexuality in marriage.

Key Terms: *Women, Gender Justice, Life-Affirming, Marriage, Husband, Wife, Zambia, Imbusa, Banacimbusa, Sex, Identities.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE STUDY: ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

1 Introduction

In Zambia, the *Imbusa* (sacred emblems to be handed down to young brides) initiation ritual is perceived as crucial for establishing a lasting and strong marriage. Women from almost all the ethnic groups use the *Imbusa* ritual as a means of teaching the young bride secrets of being a good wife. This study examines the contribution of *Imbusa* initiation rites in the construction of Zambian married women's identities. It explores the manner in which the ritual is used in the creation and maintenance of an ideal wife in Zambia. Broadly framed within African women's theologies and social-psychology theory, this study seeks to explore whether and how the *Imbusa* initiation rite is utilised to construct the 'wellbeing' of married women of Zambia. This chapter sets out to present the study, by outlining its orientation and background, a preliminary literature review, the research question and objectives and theoretical framework.

1.1 Background

Imbusa initiation rites are very significant for contemporary Bemba women of Zambia despite the many changes that have significantly altered the religio-cultural practices of the Bemba people. Every young woman is consciously raised with an expectation that she will undergo *Imbusa* initiation one day. It is something that makes every parent proud because it is more or less a public declaration that they have raised their daughter with good morals as understood by Bemba people. Thus, it is only those young women who get married who have the privilege to undergo such an initiation. Growing up as a young Bemba girl, I was taught that all cultural practices such as *ukukuna*¹ led to good and successful marriages. Marriage is highly regarded among the Bemba people just like other

¹ *Ukukuna* is the elongation of the labia minora because it is believed among the Bemba people that a man enjoys sexual relations with a woman who has elongated labia. It is also believed that this elongation opens up the birth canal hence, is helpful during child birth.

ethnic groups within Zambia and Africa. The many ethnic groups in Zambia have been influenced by the Bemba people concerning the *Imbusa* initiation rite. This means that most ethnic groups in Zambia practice what is equivalent to *Imbusa* initiation rites even though they may call it by a different name. While this study will focus on Bemba people, because as the researcher, I am part of the Bemba ethnic group and I have an understanding of the Bemba *Imbusa* initiation rite, the study will incorporate the lived experiences of women from Tumbuka, Chewa and Kaonde ethnic groups of Zambia who have undergone the same rite. Men do not go through the *Imbusa* teachings; however, they have the expectation that women would have undergone initiations such as the elongation of their labia. With this in mind, Bemba people therefore believe that a house only becomes a home when there is a woman, and therefore, a woman is considered the home. That is why the *Imbusa* teaching is specifically for women and not men. Similarly, Lillian Siwila (2011:6) narrates, “During my teen life, I saw this setting as a societal norm that did not need any challenge even when it called for coercion on the side of the girl. This is because in a cultural setting of this nature, marriage is more of a mandate than an option.” Further motivating my study is the findings of an earlier literature-based study, which showed that Bemba women are set up for subjugation in marriage during the *Imbusa* teachings (Kaunda 2011:26). This study established that *Imbusa* (sacred emblems/traditional teaching aids) songs have been a contributing factor to the subjugation of women in marriage. In this previous study, it was observed that during the *Imbusa* songs² teachings, women are taught to submit to the husband who is the head of the home (head signifying authority) unreservedly (Kaunda 2011:1). While it is true that these songs are used to teach submission, the study sought to understand the ways in which Bemba women of Zambia can use culture (*Imbusa* songs) to empower women and liberate women’s experiences in marriage. Several recommendations also arose, among them the recommendation (which is also a question for further research) to conduct empirical research with women who have undergone such a teaching in order to know how the initiation rite is used as a space to construct the health and wellbeing of Bemba married women (Kaunda 2011:29). It was argued that *Imbusa* initiation could be a space for empowering women in marriage and society as it is a place of solidarity for women. The trend, it could be argued, has been

² The Bemba people claim to teach through songs; a song is sung and its meaning interpreted to the recipients/initiates.

to teach women subjugation and as a result, women have learnt to live “graciously” under the domination of their husbands.

This current study however, is an exploratory study and concerned with the contribution of the *Imbusa* teaching to constructing “female identities”³ and whether and how this same space could be utilized to construct “alternative femininities”⁴ of married Bemba women. This study is exploratory in that it is flexible and not fixed. Peter Swanborn (2010:30) describes exploratory research as open and flexible “towards the phenomenon under study”. This means for this study that while I may give a certain perspective to this study, it is prone to change after the data has been collected, especially if the data collected proves differently. Alluding to this fact, Swanborn (2010:30) explains that in an exploratory study, direction can readily change due to the findings as “research decisions follow the data; diversions are allowed”. The openness and flexible nature of an exploratory study gives room to unexpected development and “new discourse findings” as the probabilities of an interesting and pertinent outcome are higher than in a fixed approach. Women in the Bemba community are seen as custodians of culture and also as ‘the home’; that is why Bemba women and men emphasize *Imbusa* teachings before a woman gets married. If a woman gets married without this teaching she is ridiculed and always carries the stigma of the “untaught” wherever she goes. And since women among the Bemba people are perceived as ‘the home’, they are the ones who have to undergo *Imbusa* teachings so that they can be conscientized on how to provide moral guidance to the family. This teaching stretches even to visitors; a woman is the one to welcome and make visitors feel at home. Alluding to this point, Siwila (2005:1) asserts that a woman is given the teaching⁵ among the Tonga people of Zambia that a welcoming and good wife must take care of her in-laws and visitors. Hospitality, in serving of food, is part of being a good wife. *Imbusa* traditional emblems in this study are used as traditional teaching aids (symbols) carrying moral teachings for family and social harmony. It must be noted that the most emphasized teaching in *Imbusa* is sex. While *Imbusa* mainly

³ ‘Female identities’ is used in this study as a perception that postulates the position and status that comes with Bemba married women, or that comes with being married for Bemba women, which is culturally, socially or psychologically constructed.

⁴ In this study, I use the term ‘alternative femininities’ as a way in which married women, through *Imbusa* teaching, can rationalize, articulate and construct their own femininities for an equal partnership in marriage.

⁵ This teaching is also given to Bemba women (and other ethnic groups) of Zambia from a very young age.

deals with private issues concerning the home and sexuality, these issues also have a public dimension to them that affect the whole community (see chapter two and four).

1.2 Preliminary Literature Study and the Location of the Research

This study will use already existing literature and in-depth interviews in dealing with the effect that *Imbusa* teaching has on Bemba women. The literature review will be divided as follows: literature on the *Imbusa* traditional teaching and literature on theory and methodology.

1.2.1 Literature on the *Imbusa* traditional teaching

As stated above, the *Imbusa* initiation rite is vital and important for creating solidarity of the community. In her 1982 book *Chisungu*, Audrey Richards has flatteringly recorded the Bemba initiation ceremony for girls and brides-to-be in detail. Before delving into the ceremony as Richards saw it, she presents Bemba ideology and dogma; here she stresses the importance that the Bemba people accord sex, fire and blood. For the Bemba people these three things are important and dangerous at the same time, dangerous because as Richards (1982:30) has noted, if they are brought into wrongful contact with each other they can bring about disastrous results. And since the three, fire, blood and fire, are a woman's responsibility, a woman has to receive instruction on how to handle these and many other taboos through the *Imbusa* teaching. Richards (1982:60-111) then gives a detailed account of the *Chisungu* ceremony she had attended in 1931. Around the time that she attended this ceremony, it was imperative that as soon as a girl reached puberty and went through the ritual, she was ready for marriage. Thus the *Chisungu* ceremony is where the *Imbusa* teachings took place. Having given a systematic detail of the ceremony, Richards has not dealt with the effect this teaching has on the experiences of women. This is why this current study is focused on the effects of the *Imbusa* teachings on its recipients, women.

Joseph Corbeil (1982), in his book *Mbusa: Sacred Emblems of the Bemba*, has also recorded songs that are sung during the *Imbusa* ceremony. He however has recorded the songs for archival purposes so that the Bemba people would not forget their important cultural heritage when it comes to marriage teachings. In his own words Corbeil (1982:6) explicates that this book is to "help the Bemba people

to keep alive a great love for and pride in their customs, and to remind them of the sacredness of family life and the obligations they undertake when they enter into marriage”. Nevertheless, he has not addressed power issues that older women teach younger women during these ceremonies whereby women are intentionally or unintentionally taught that a man is above them and therefore they are to submit to him unreservedly. Corbeil has successfully recorded *Imbusa* songs but has not analyzed them nor the initiation rite itself and its impact on women.

Lillian Siwila (2011) has recently, in her PhD thesis “Culture, Gender, and HIV and AIDS: United Church of Zambia’s Response to Traditional Marriage Practices”, wrestled with how cultural practices have put women at a greater risk of getting infected with HIV. Her research is on child marriages and widow sexual cleansing as cultural practices that have heightened the increase in HIV and AIDS among women more than men. Using feminist cultural hermeneutics, Siwila grappled with what the response of the United Church Zambia (henceforth UCZ) is to traditional marriage practices, which are harmful in the context of HIV and AIDS. Siwila (2011:24) has argued that a feminist cultural hermeneutical framework provides “‘logic for intervening’ in that it provides a perspective by which traditional marriage practices and the responses of the church can be analyzed using a gendered framework”. Although Siwila has throughout the study dealt with questions concerning the role that the church plays either in discouraging or promoting traditional marriage practices that contribute to the spread of HIV, she has not paid serious attention to *Imbusa* teachings as a place where such cultural practices as widow cleansing are instilled in women strongly.

Most recently, Jonathan Kangwa (2011), in his Master’s thesis “Reclaiming the Values of Indigenous Female Initiation Rites as a Strategy for HIV Prevention: A Gendered Analysis of Chisungu Initiation Rites among the Bemba People of Zambia”, has also grappled with the issue of *Imbusa*. Also using a feminist cultural hermeneutics framework, Kangwa (2011:7) has tried to retrieve the values in *Chisungu* initiation rites for Bemba girls to fight against HIV and AIDS. Kangwa has emphasized how such rituals can reclaim and empower women for the fight against HIV and AIDS. Kangwa’s thrust is redeeming the *chisungu* rite in order to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS among the Bemba people. However, Kangwa has not paid critical attention to issues that Bemba girls and

women are taught about their wellbeing during the *chisungu* and *Imbusa* initiation rites. Kangwa (2011:36) has vehemently explained that there are values in *chisungu* initiation for Bemba girls that can be retrieved for the empowerment of Bemba girls and women in the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. While I agree that women receive valuable teachings from *chisungu* and *Imbusa* initiations, Kangwa has romanticized the ritual in order to retrieve the values for preventive measures against HIV and AIDS. He glosses over issues of ‘identity’ that the Bemba girls and women receive in this teaching.

The preceding literature survey indicates that while some work has been done on initiation rites in the Zambian context, a gap still exists in terms of an examination of whether the crucial role of the *Imbusa* initiation rite has a link to the construction of ‘wellbeing and identity’ among married women in Zambia.

1.2.2 Literature on Theory and Methodology

This study will be broadly framed within an African women’s theological framework. This is important because, like African theologies, African women’s theologies draw their sources from rites, rituals songs, proverbs, riddles and so on. Phiri (2008/9) has explained that African women’s theologies are a strand within African theology. It is an “irruption within an irruption” as Mercy Oduyoye has cogently called the intervention of African women in the development of African theology (Fabella 1993:93). African women realized that they needed to talk about women’s issues themselves and not let men be the custodians of documenting women’s experiences. This is why Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2006:8) have argued that women’s experiences are a chief cornerstone to feminist theology of which African women theologies are a branch, and that women’s experiences are not universal but contextual.

Catherine Mwihiia (2005) in her Master’s thesis “A Theological Analysis of African Proverbs about Women” discusses the deconstruction of the proverbs that are dehumanising to women among the Gikuyu people. She suggests that there is a need for women to come up with new positive proverbs

and reject those proverbs that have given a negative image to women in society. She has given an extensive analysis of how dehumanising most of the Gikuyu (like other African) proverbs are to women. Mwihiya's study is informative to the present study as I analyse *Imbusa*, which is a rite of passage, and how it contributes to the construction of the Bemba women's identity. Thus, this study is broadly framed within the African women's theological framework,⁶ focusing on culture. This leads to African feminist cultural hermeneutics, which is explained extensively in chapter three.

1.3 The Research Problem and Objectives

Rasing (2004:280) has succinctly asserted, "Initiation rites express and confirm solidarity and unity among women. Norms and values concerning gender, production and reproduction, and cosmological ideas are passed on" during these rites. This situation begins for women from the time they are young as they are always told to respect their husbands and submit.

1.3.1 Research Question

Much of the research done on the *Imbusa* initiation rite have focused on the link between the rite and the issues of HIV and AIDS and others have focused on the significance of the rite among the Bemba people. However, not enough research has been done on the role of *Imbusa* initiation rite in the construction of 'wellbeing' among married women. The research question I am raising in this study is:

How does the *Imbusa* initiation rite shape the humanity and wellbeing of married women in the Zambian context?

In response to the above key question, the sub-questions are as follows: What is the role of *Imbusa* initiation rites in the Zambian context? What identities are constructed during the *Imbusa* initiation

⁶There are different types of African women's theologies, which include African traditional religions, Islamic traditions etc.

rites? In what ways has the *Imbusa* initiation rite been utilized to the construction of married women's 'wellbeing' in Zambia?

1.3.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

To evaluate the role of *Imbusa* initiation rites in the *Zambian* context;

To explore whether and what identities are constructed during the *Imbusa* initiation rites and;

To demonstrate in what ways the *Imbusa* initiation rite has been used for the construction of married women's 'wellbeing' in Zambia.

This leads to the theoretical frameworks utilized in this study.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks will inform this study. The first framework is African women's theologies which will provide a lens through which to view the contribution of *Imbusa* rite in constructing wellbeing. African women's theologians are aware that not everything in African culture is liberating. Hence, they approach African culture with caution or suspicion to identify the positive aspects and promote them (Oduyoye 2001:12). With this lens, African culture is perceived as "the locus of resistance" (Oduyoye 2001:12). It is evident that African women's theologies empower African women to critique their culture from within and avoid impositions from without. Culture and rituals are crucial for challenging and changing culture and ritual, "appropriating what is of value and upholds women's humanity" (Phiri 1997b:70). Phiri (1997a:70; see also Njoroge 1997:80) points out that like women theologians globally, African women theologians also condemn sexism in church and society as atrocious but they go further to analyze African religio-cultural heritage in order to retrieve life giving and affirming aspects. In this sense, African women's theologies are theologies of liberation. Within this study, this framework constitutes a resource for envisioning an alternative relationship in marriage in which the full humanity of Bemba and other

women can be affirmed. *Imbusa* will be analyzed through this lens in order to expose the role it plays in constructing married women's 'wellbeing' in their marriages.

The second theory this study draws on is social psychology theory which will provide a lens through which to view the construction of femininities during the *Imbusa* initiation rite. Within social psychological theory, I am concentrating on status construction theory. David Patterson and Robert Keefe (2008:113) have defined status construction theory as,

Concerned with the processes by which people describe, explain, or account for the world in which they live. The theory postulates that a person's beliefs are created within the social context in which he or she lives and as such his or her knowledge, as a social phenomenon, develops within social interaction.

Imbusa is a social context where women's worldview of marriage is enforced and encoded. This means that married women's views of marriage are established in the *Imbusa* initiation rite and their identity as married women is shaped within this context. They go on to explain that status construction theory impacts the formation of guiding principles in the way that those with authority in groups define particularly the outcomes and expectations of their group; for instance, *banacimbusa* among the Bemba people determines what should comprise the teachings in *Imbusa* and how an initiated woman has to behave. Further, Patterson and Keefe (2008:113) argue that "identifiable groups in a society are infused with culturally constructed positive or negative images that pressure lawmakers to target policies toward, or away from, a given group". This for the Bemba women means that since the lawmakers in *Imbusa* initiation rite are the *banacimbusa*, and they shape what a woman becomes in marriage after undergoing the rite, their (*banacimbusa*) lived experiences become theories on which policies and laws of *Imbusa* are built. Similarly, Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll (2006:431) have contended that "Status can also be seen as an evaluative hierarchy among individuals in which one person is more respected, deferred to and influential than another". This among the Bemba people is observed between initiated and uninitiated married women; an uninitiated woman is not respected because she is seen as someone who does not have knowledge of how to keep her marriage. In this sense, I will seek to explore ways in which *Imbusa* initiation rites contribute in constructing married women in Zambia. The rite of marriage for African women, as

the African feminist psychologist Bongiwe Ngcobo (2009:1) argues, is accompanied by many social psychological challenges; married women's identity construction is one of the most important. Sandra Bem (1993:2) has defined social psychology as a theory that seeks to understand how certain patterns of behaviors are constructed in social situations. Bem (1993:2) explains that perceptions about sex and gender are "embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions and individual psyches". Bame Nsamenang (2007:7-12) argues that in Africa, social psychology should analyse how myths, riddles, proverbs, rites of passage are communally utilised as social tools in socialising and constructing African people's identities. Thus, status construction theory will be used as a resource to help women become aware of their gender-role socialization process and find alternative ways of replacing the subordinate roles. This means that gender role construction is not arrived at by chance; there are social, cultural and psychological factors at play. Utilizing status construction as a social psychology theory, I will show how individuals obtain gender lenses through which they construct "a conventionally gendered self or resist acquiring those gender lenses and thereby become gender subversive" (Bem 1993:133). Bem (1993:136) further suggests that, "through acceptance of female inferiority" during initiation rite processes, female gender roles are constructed. Anne Dickson (1982:10) clarifies that male and female are not born with any sex-linked psychological traits; rather these are shaped by cultural surrounding. Within the Bemba world-view, *Imbusa* as the central aspect of culture embodies within it models for social behaviour among married women. It has constitutive meaning and helps shape commonly accepted behaviours within marriage and society. In Bemba culture when a woman is married, she is expected to behave in an acceptable norm; this is emphasized in the initiation rite. Therefore, the initiation rite psychologically constructs women's identity due to the fear of failure to behave in the way a married woman should. When a married woman behaves contrary to what she was taught during the initiation, her husband is allowed to take her back to her parents so that she can be sent back to her *banacimbusa* (mother of sacred emblems to be handed down /bearers of traditional teaching aids/symbols) for more teachings. This is shameful to her parents and *banacimbusa*; she may be discriminated against as a result. In her discourse about teenage pregnancies in faith communities, Ngcobo (2009:61) stresses that those who do not adhere or fail to observe the set code of conduct become socially excluded. Therefore, to be identified as an ideal married woman, one needs to adhere to the *Imbusa* teachings seriously. This

raises a question: how does this social rite of passage affect women psychologically? Thus, I will seek to enquire how ‘identities’ are constructed and reinforced on married women during the *Imbusa* cultural space.

1.5 Summary Structure of the Dissertation

The study will be developed in six chapters as follows: **Chapter one**, “introducing the study”, will focus on the problem statement, objectives, methodology in relation to the significance of the study. This is followed by **Chapter two** which will be a critical exposition of the *Imbusa* initiation rite and the role of *banacimbusa* in passing the teaching to young brides within Bemba tradition and culture. Here I will discuss the place of marriage in Bemba world-view and the role *Imbusa* plays in ensuring the success and longevity of marriage. I will also analyze the role of the rite in creating strong social bonds and communal solidarity. **Chapter three** will discuss the methodology to be utilized in the process of the research. **Chapter Four** will present the findings of the study in a thematic way under the heading, *Imbusa ritual and the construction of women’s identities in Zambia*. **Chapter Five**, developing from the preceding chapter will develop some alternative ways of doing *Imbusa* for affirmation of life within the context of marriage. Finally, **Chapter six** will be a general conclusion in which I will summarize the arguments of the study.

Having outlined the orientation and background of this study, in the following chapter an analysis of the role that *Imbusa* ritual plays in the Zambian marriage context will be offered.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INSTITUTION OF *IMBUSA* AND WOMEN'S STATUS IN MARRIAGE AMONG THE BEMBA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

2. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the statement of the problem underscoring the purpose of this study and its framework. The present chapter sets to explore the *Imbusa* initiation ceremony among the Bemba people and its effect on the status of women in marriage. Mercy Oduyoye (1995b:11, see also Tamale 2005:9) has argued that in Africa, ritual practice is intricately linked to practically every aspect of life: marriage, birth, puberty, death, mourning, politics, war, social roles, religion, kinship structures, identity construction and so on. The connection between ritual and the status of women in marriage is one of the more controversial issues which have been discussed by African women theologians (Oduyoye 1995b:134). I want to explore the various ways in which the marriage ritual is used both as an oppressive and empowering resource. No institution could be considered more significant to Africans than marriage. This high regard and perception of marriage as sacred is what necessitates performance of ritual which in the Bemba culture is performed on women who were perceived as *cibinda wa ng'anda* (head/owner of the house) in pre-colonial Bemba society (Kaunda 2010:6).

In a desire to gain a better understanding of the connection between the status of Bemba women in marriage and the ritual, this chapter focuses on one particular cultural initiation rite among the Bemba of Zambia, namely *Imbusa*. When one speaks of *Imbusa* among the Bemba people, this is clearly understood to signify one of the rituals that have persisted and endured through centuries as a tradition of marriage initiation. At the core of this elaborate socio-cultural institution is *banacimbusa* (mother of sacred emblems to be handed down /bearers of traditional teaching aids/symbols), whose role is to mentor young women *muntambi ne fisbalano* (time-honoured social values) “in a wide range of sexual matters, including pre-menarche practices, pre-marriage preparation, erotic instruction and reproduction” (Tamale 2005:9). In a sense, the young woman receives instructions

on how to keep her marriage. She is taught how to treat her in-laws and especially her husband. Without undergoing *Imbusa* teaching, a girl is seen as unfit to handle marriage and she can never become a *nacimbusa* and can never be invited in a place where the *Imbusa* teaching is taking place as she is *chitongo* (untaught or uncultured). The institution of *Imbusa* has in many ways exhibited resilience and tenacious adaptability in the context of modernization and globalization but has also shown continuity in the different contexts of the Zambian Diaspora.

This chapter begins by explicating the significance of the ritual among the Bemba people. A short historical evaluation of the institution of *Imbusa* is then provided. Then the role of *Imbusa* within Bemba society and a brief exposition of *Imbusa* are provided.

2.1. The Role of the *Imbusa* Ritual among the Bemba

The *Imbusa* initiation rite is a significant rite for women who are about to enter into marriage. It is a transition ritual which is perceived as a means to cross boundaries, changes in time and social status (Rasing 1995:34). It is usually presumed that the bride is a virgin before she is married. The initiation rite takes one or two months to complete. As soon as *lobola*⁷ and preparations for the wedding are made, two months prior to the wedding, the rite commences. The *Imbusa* initiation rite is a place where a woman is prepared into becoming what an ideal married woman ought to be. Within this space, a woman is taught what is expected of her by the husband, in-laws and community; should she behave differently there would be consequences. Thera Rasing (2004:279) defines initiation as “a rite of transition and sets out the basis for adult life by constructing a new identity for a woman”. This means that the *Imbusa* initiation marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, as well as from being unmarried to being married for Bemba (and other Zambian) women. *Imbusa* initiation starts a month or few weeks before the wedding. The young bride is secluded in a house or room where she and her *banacimbusa* spend the time in marital counselling and teachings. Rasing (2004:278) has similarly explained that women’s initiation rites are “an intrinsic part of traditional culture and

⁷ Gift given to the bride’s family as assurance that the man will marry their daughter.

society” and has been performed by experts for a long period of time. These rites are not only significant or in existence in traditional/rural societies in Zambia, urban women in Zambia equally emphasize the worth of the *Imbusa* initiation. While not disputing the significance of the women initiations such as *Imbusa*, Mercy Oduyoye (1995a:134) has argued that the ritual is a key site through which women's subordination is maintained and enforced within African society. Oduyoye (1995b:11) further argues that the ritual is so significant that “an individual’s path through life is monitored, marked, and celebrated from even before birth to death, and thereafter the events in the life of a community echo this same cycle”. Indeed, the whole life of an African is marked by ritual after ritual. Yet, it has been observed that women undergo many more rituals in comparison to men (Oduyoye 1995b:16).

When looking at the women-centred nature of the ritual, Rasing (2001:23) is right that initiation rites are significant in the “construction of female identity, pride, autonomy and meaning”. While there is some truth in such a claim, the concern lies in the identity constructed and what the girls make of it. Christine Mushimbwe (2009:130) argues “the initiation rite is an ideology-based set of practices whose aim is to reproduce young women who are well established in the customs of their forefathers and who would later on pass these customs down to their children”. Thus, for Mushimbwe (2009:131) the significance of the initiation rites is therefore “to introduce the young girl to adult life or womanhood, although the full status of real womanhood would only be acquired after one had given birth”. Similarly, Rosemary Edet (1995:26, italics mine) has argued that:

women’s ritual in Africa fall under ritual ideology which aims at controlling, in a conservative way, the behavior, the mood, the sentiment, and the values of women for the sake of the community as a whole. Much of the concern is to instruct, to direct, and *to program individuals as they enter upon new tasks*, and to stabilize society by preventing individuals from straying too far from the roles they have assumed.

The ritual is depicted here as a mechanism for domesticating women in the way of the community. Through the ritual, the dos and don’ts of the community are reinforced. In short, through *Imbusa*, the Bemba community seeks to bring not only social coherence and stability but the ritual is “needed also for social experience in time, for change, for interaction” (Dallistone 1986:219). A ritual like *Imbusa* is meant to stir action and bind together a social group. Thus, there is a way in which the

ritual could be utilised to promote social transformation rather than be a mere cultural preservation or maintaining of status quo. Therefore, *Imbusa* has been perceived to be necessary for maintaining an intricate balance of life in the community and it is meant to preserve the normal order of societal life (Rasing 1995, Rude 1999). It is the medium of understanding the world around and a mechanism for renewing and reconciling or making things right (Edet 1995:26). Among the Bemba people, *Imbusa* ritual has several aims. Here two of them may be highlighted as follows:

2.1.1. *Imbusa* is a Mechanism for Community Counselling

The *Imbusa* initiation rite is a form or method used by the community for premarital counselling of women for viable marriages. It is not only the initiator who benefits from this institution but it works as a marriage enrichment program where every woman who has undergone the ritual has an opportunity to refresh themselves. Yet this counselling is a secret, as it can only be revealed to a woman that is entering into marriage (Rasing 1995:38). It is a very specific marital teaching. One hears such statements as ‘marriage is not for children but adults’. This means that a mature person who is ready for marriage is the one that undergoes the teachings. The women are not taught in the form of sermons or lectures, as a methodology of marriage counselling in community, *Imbusa* initiation rites use songs, proverbs, drums, story, and poultry moulded on the floor and painted on the walls. Everything that needs emphasis is made visual so it can be easy for one to remember. This teaching is based on community praxis. It starts with the marriage experiences of the community which are developed into theory. When women receive teaching from the initiation rite, they go and put their teaching into practice where they formulate theories that are brought back to the teaching space where they also pass on information as they have experienced the teaching in praxis. The teaching is therefore in a circular mode; one gets the teaching, goes and lives it in marriage and comes back to teach another how the teaching has worked out in her marriage.

2.1.2. *Imbusa* as a Mechanism for Community Bondedness and Solidarity

Looking for a particular kind of marriage (life-giving), Bemba women sought a way to prepare themselves for marriage because a woman is central to marriage; thus special and secret teachings are for a woman. Virginity is emphasized on the woman's part through the wisdom passed from generation to generation via *Imbusa*. This can be done by those who have gone through the teaching and acquired much experience. Christine Mushibwe (2009:118) explains that a woman is to follow such teachings strictly if she is to be accepted as one of the initiated ones. Further, Mushibwe (2009:118) explains that following such teachings is a way of solidarity with other women in the community and society. Rasing (1995:39) asserts "information, understanding and experience is needed to ensure the correct performance" of the rite. Senior women, who collectively hand down wisdom to young brides, are those with immense experience and whose marriages are standing; and their services are rewarded (fees). Rasing (1995:39) further notes that conducting these rites means accepting serious accountability that the marriage will be success as the initiate will follow through the teaching.

What prompted the *Imbusa* initiation rite is the desire for the Bemba women to develop viable marriages, not cohabiting or polygamy. Thus the *Imbusa* is seen as a mechanism to protect themselves and prepare to make the marriage work and last. Therefore, women had to stand in solidarity concerning marriage and help each other have better marriages. Mushibwe (2009:119) elaborates that women need each other's loyalty in order to stand in solidarity in the community. Therefore, as the teaching goes on during *Imbusa*, everyone participates in helping shape the young bride as well as remind themselves of the value of these teachings. Similarly, Rasing (1995:80) states that the teaching is for the initiate as well as *ifImbusa* (All women involved in the teaching). In this way it is noted that women keep learning and re-evaluating their experiences in marriage as they pass these on to the young and learn from the other *banacimbusa* and married women. It is an experimental kind of learning that leads to developing new ideas and theories. Every woman invited is involved in teaching and learning. By being invited, one should be able to share their own experiences and thus, pass on information to the young and fellow married women; in this instance,

banacimbusa only facilitates the initiation although she takes an active role and controls how the whole process should work out. As soon as one is initiated and married, she will be invited to others' initiation and she should be able to participate in the teaching because she also becomes a teacher to others after her initiation. *Imbusa* was a teaching that included and still includes all the women who have undergone the teaching so that they too can share their lived experiences while also learning from other women's lived experiences. In this way women stand together to help the young women prepare for their marriage as is expected of them. The initiation rite is an inclusive teaching space for women. Even those who eloped or were cohabiting (which was seriously condemned) would be welcome to such a learning and teaching space for women, only if they decided to formalize their relationship. Therefore, in this sense, it can be argued that *banacimbusa* are there to facilitate the whole initiation process and remain as mentors until the bride has had her first child.

2.2. Exposition of the *Imbusa* Ritual

The *Imbusa* ritual is also called *ukuombela ng'anda* (ritual performance for a viable home) which follows after *ukucindila icisungu* (dancing for the wonder of initial menstruation) recognized by Bemba, known as women's rituals. The ritual is in schematic or naturalistic forms of paintings. Mushibwe (2009: 114), writing on the Tumbuka people of Zambia, affirms that the Bemba speaking people of the Northern part of Zambia use schematic forms of drawings during the initiation ceremonies. The common drawings of pictures and models called the *Imbusa*, an artistic array of a variety of symbols, models and drawings using the three colours, can never be understood unless *banacimbusa* or *umaombelwa* (a woman who has gone through the teaching) explains them. Victor Turner (1969:7) rightly affirms that "it is one thing to observe people performing the stylized gesture and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performance and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the movements and words mean to them". Mushibwe (2009:133-134) observes that these secrets are well guarded by all women who have gone through *Imbusa*. She feels that this is what ensures the reproduction of the women's own suppression and reinforcement of male superiority. Lillian Siwila (2011:18,) agrees with Mushibwe that:

The teaching on secrecy in marriage is so intense that some of the proverbial songs sung for the bride during the wedding are to tell her to keep secrets in her marriage. As much as this helps to keep the integrity of the community and the marriage, this teaching has also contributed to the silencing of women even when there is abuse in the family.

Siwila (2011:18) further argues that this culture of silence among women is so strong in Zambia that it has contributed to the oppression and suppression of women. Yet Mushibwe (2009:118) generalizes and argues that “throughout Zambia, and in all its ethnic groupings, cultural traditions continue to relegate women to inferior roles”. She (2009:125) feels that while good morals are taught with “crafty intention” and there is nothing wrong with some of the roles or skills such as respect for the elders or good eating habits and so on, nevertheless to train the women to consider the opposite sex as superior subjects upon whom they can depend, and themselves as inferior objects, has psychological implication that can lead to the development of a subordinate temperament in married women that respects the opposite sex with veneration. For Mushibwe (2009:125), such kind of socialization or teaching could lead to inequality and lack of productive freedom for the woman. There is some truth in Mushibwe’s argument, as among the Bemba people, the woman is taught not to expose marital problems to outsiders. Yet Mushibwe (2009:129) seems to suggest that the ritual be done away with because it “could have a negative impact on the attitude of the female child towards her academic education”. This suggestion seems to give an inferiority status to the ritual and side-lines the significance of *Imbusa* as the basis of Bemba cultural identity of the people. Contrary to Mushibwe’s subtle analysis which produces a model that depicts *Imbusa* as a tool for the socialization of women to docile obedience, some sympathetic anthropologists and theologians (see for example Hinfelaar 1994, Rasing 2001, and Kaunda 2010), argue that *Imbusa* in the pre-colonial and missionary Bemba culture was the basis of gender balance. Rasing (2001:58), writing on *Imbusa* initiation, has argued that “gender division concerning work was neither strict nor static, but changed depending on the situation”. For Rasing (2001:28), Bemba women were not made ‘invisible’ by *Imbusa* but by the implementation of colonial rule and Christianity. Earlier existing gender relations changed to a significant extent, especially with regards to matrilineal and matrilineal organization of Bemba society. In fact, Rasing (2001:23) argues that the Western stereotyping of *Imbusa* initiation rites as “expressions of internalised oppression of women”, was based on wrong assumptions. She

(1995:15) feels that the *Imbusa* ritual “does not denote inferiority as represented by some analysts to mean before the introduction of Christianity into Zambia”. David Schoenbrun (2004:254), writing on “gendered themes in early African history”, observes that “the study of matrilineal societies, especially in this part of central Africa, has been very important for undermining the view of universal male dominance”. Indeed, it helps to unveil the ways in which this “hegemony remained partial and contested” (Wright 2004:413). In this sense, Mushibwe’s (2009:110) argument that rituals such as *Imbusa* “involves manipulation and canalization” of women into subservient roles in marriage is not entirely true. What may be true is the fact that Bemba women are both custodians of traditions and at times have been “agents of their own subordination” (Rasing 2001:13). Nevertheless, the ritual “has much potential to help improve and safeguard life, and with this in mind, it may need improvement and development (Fiedler 2005:8). It is this awareness that necessitates that an empirical inquiry is done in order to hear the views of the women who have undergone the *Imbusa* initiation rite. This is important so that drawing conclusions on behalf of the Bemba married women is avoided (see chapter five).

2.2.1. The Nature of the *Imbusa* Initiation Rite

In the *Imbusa* ritual, “almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other than itself. It is more than it seems, and often a good deal more” (Turner 1969:15). Similarly Rasing (1995:45) reveals that *Imbusa* is a symbolic activity which is taught through action, language, and images to explain and affect the Bemba world-view and specifically what it means to be an adult and a married woman in the community. *Imbusa* itself refers to both the drawings on the walls and the clay models that are moulded on the floor (Corbeil 1982). These drawings and clay models which include dots and stripes are worked in three colours: red, black and white (Mushibwe 2009:113). This observation was made earlier by Audrey Richards in her book on the *Chisungu* initiation ceremony among the Bemba people in 1956. According to Richards (1956, see also Rasing 1995), the first colour is red which represents the menstrual blood (*Kumweshi*), which symbolises danger. It is a warning and couples are taught not to have any sexual relations during this period. The wife has to put up a symbol of red

beads in the bedroom for the husband to know that she is menstruating. The second colour is black which represents death and sickness in the family, when again couples are to abstain from sex for fear of death. This colour is also associated with the pubic hair which should not be disposed of carelessly after shaving. The third colour is white which symbolises purity and fertility. It represents the cervix and safe periods, when couples could enjoy sexual intercourse, which results in offspring. These three colours summarize the teaching of *Imbusa* (Richards 1956; Corbeil 1982; Rasing 1995). Rasing (1995:56) further maintains that blood, sex and fire may symbolize constant danger because failure to comply with the societal warnings and norms is believed to cause diseases. In addition, Rasing (1995:45) reveals that the initiation rite has three phases; the separation, the liminal and the aggregation phases. The separation phase is symbolically secluded which signifies that the initiate is moving from an early phase into another in social community or structure (Rasing 1995:35). The intermediate phase which I will focus on briefly below is called the liminal phase and is the most crucial and could be considered as the main phase. The third phase is aggregation; here the passage is concluded. This marks the end of the initiation process when the initiate comes out into the open confirming her new status. She would have been accepted as a woman and is therefore expected to behave in line with customary norms and ethical standards (Rasing 1995:34).

2.2.1.1. The Liminal Phase

The liminal stage is the most critical phase of the initiation ceremony. It is during this period that the girl is refashioned into a new person. The characteristics of this phase are ambiguous because the initiate passes through a cultural realm that has none of the attributes of the past or the coming state (Rasing 1995:34). The liminal stage is the longest. The young woman is stripped naked or wears only a slip of clothing to demonstrate that she has no status or property. Her nakedness also serves to humiliate her, for she is made into a non-person; she is teased and treated badly in order to make her strong in dealing with all disappointments that life may bring on her (Rasing 1995:36). This harassment can take a verbal form such as “teasing” or ridicule and may take the form of behaviour aimed at “belittling or embarrassing” the young woman (Mushibwe 2009:133). The young women in this stage “must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group or society in those respects that pertain to the new status” (Rasing 1995:36). Mushibwe

(2009:134) observes that both Rasing (1995) and Mbikusita-Lewanika (1979) are in agreement that “the ordeals and humiliations have a physical and emotional nature”. Yet Rasing (1995:36) also feels that the process “has an ontological value; it refashions the being of the initiate”. Rasing’s position seems to have been influenced by the current argument that missionaries have given an inferior status to African ritual. Hence, she seems to be doing damage control at the expense of the truth. The question is: is there anything life-giving in harassing the young woman? Such a ritual is often accompanied by fear, hope, and the inevitable disillusionment and uncertainty. It can be a system to keep the women under control. Can one ask: what is the psychological impact on women from such a process? Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1983:155) perceives such process of initiation as,

Instilling an attitude of submission to man into women’s hearts by making them accustomed to the notion that they were born to take second place in society. During the ceremony, the girls are told that from now onwards their task is to procreate and attend to their husbands and their homes, and any other task is forbidden to them. These initiatory rites, surrounded as they are by an aura of mystery and religious solemnity, have such a devastating psychological impact on the girls that they are mesmerized into a blind acceptance of the indoctrination through a traumatic experience bound to affect them for the rest of their lives.

The whole process seems to be setting women up for subservient roles in their marriage. As claimed by Cutrufelli, women are made to uncritically and unquestionably accept teachings of terror and hence the dominance of men could be accepted as the right thing, despite its oppressive nature (see chapter four). Indeed, it can have psychological repercussions on the self-perception of the young woman in marriage. Tamale (2005: 6) argues that the initiations are fraught with inconsistency and inconclusiveness and the main theme includes subservience, “manipulation and the control by women”. This is in agreement with the characteristics of this stage which are submissiveness and silence. It is possible that young men are manipulated by *banacimbusa* since they have no right to question or even ask questions about the teaching itself. There is absence of dialogue in the process of transmitting the teaching and this makes the teacher active and the initiate passive. It is not based on a dialogical framework which is liberating, but a domesticating model which according to Paulo Freire (1996) is disempowering. In the *Imbusa* process, the initiate is not supposed to look up and see the people who come to see her. Some of the characteristics expected of the initiate are, submissiveness, to learn in silence, to be passive and humble and obey the instructors without

question. Such characteristics are the features of an ideal traditionally taught woman (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1979, Rasing 1995, Tamale 2005). However, in a more recent article Rasing (2006:6, 7) argues that the songs and emblems that are disempowering to women in their marriages are contested by other songs and emblems that empower women to rebuke their husbands for immorality and to have control over their sex life. One may argue that this is not enough – that the teaching must carry the theme of empowering right from the start. The question is: is humiliation equivalent to empowerment? The young woman is subjected to critical submission to the authority that represents the whole community, the repository of cultural values, norms, attitudes and relationships (Rasing 1995:36).

It is in this stage where aspects of sexuality are taught. The young woman is taught the technique of sex dance which involves wriggling the waist while standing which is meant to help her satisfy the husband (Fiedler 2005:32). It is here that women are taught various positions they should assume to give variety to sex (Fiedler 2005:32). This is the central theme throughout the initiations. In addition, the young woman is also encouraged to lengthen or elongate the labia minora (*ukwangala*, literally means playing). Rasing (2010:4) asserts that from a young age girls are taught to play (*ukwangala*) with their genitals, however, it is not true that it is for the purpose of sexual enjoyment when they are married or to know their bodies well. *Ukwangala* is the disguised term for *ukukuna* (elongation of labia minora). Usually, girls would be encouraged to go into the bush to find herbs that they would use to elongate their labia. The first time, the paternal aunt or grandmother would teach the girl how to pull/elongate her labia then the next time, she would go to the bush or be in her room with friends to continue the ritual. Rasing (1995:31) alludes to this fact that labia elongation is very important and older women encourage girls to elongate before their initiation. If a girl had not elongated her labia, *banacimbusa* would go to the extent of even beating her because it is a disgrace for a girl to not have elongated labia at marriage age. It is believed that the man enjoys sex with a woman who has elongated labia minora. Within the rite, there is the teaching on shaving the husband by the wife. Brides are told that they need to shave their husbands' pubic hair. Rasing (1995:77) says this teaching is attached to the drawing of a razor and soap, meaning that a woman has to shave her husband and he in turn should reciprocate. The first time this is done, the wife

shaves her husband and then the husband reciprocates. This means that only a wife can shave her husband and vice versa. Should the wife shave herself, it can lead to divorce because she may be considered to have been shaved by another man (adultery). Although during the initiation rite, a woman is cautioned to be faithful to her husband and welcome her husband regardless of her suspicions that he may be having extramarital affairs, Simon Kapwepwe (1994:49) has argued that a man ought to be faithful to his wife or else he will destroy his home. Mushibwe (2009:130) feels that the lessons the initiates are taught during this period are ambiguous. Citing Chondoka, Mushibwe (2009:132) states “that a common element in the teachings stresses sexual rituals, caring for the husband and his family members, lessons in childbearing and childcare due to the fact it was a requirement to marry and to have children”. She (2009:132) further argues that it is mere obedience socialization, where women are convinced and manipulated to the extent that they set aside their natural desires for freedom and become servile and submissive. Due to ritual psychological impact, the woman may “take on an inferior status proudly and enjoy the recognition that comes with it; accepting the role as their natural prerogative”. Yet Rasing (1995:45) thinks there is a clear teaching that empowers women to become subjects of their destiny as the ritual puts emphasis not only on the power and authority of senior women but also on power and self-respect, and hygiene. Rasing (:45) argues that one critical issue that is emphasised throughout the ritual is “self-reliance”. Nevertheless, satisfying the husband sexually seems to be overemphasised in the ritual. Jonathan Kangwa (2011:18) argues that,

African women theologians have largely condemned the idea of women focusing too much on satisfying their husbands. They argue that women are turned into sex objects to satisfy their husbands thereby making them more vulnerable to HIV (Phiri 2003:10). Fiedler (2005:32) has however argued that men are also taught to satisfy their wives in sex during their initiation rites.

The problem with Kangwa’s argument is that there is no initiation rite among the Bemba people where young men can be taught about satisfying their wives sexually. The question is: is it possible to create a space where men can be taught about sexually satisfying their wives within the Bemba context? Richards (1982:51) refers to this as “the dilemma of a matrilineal society in which men are dominant but the line goes through the women”. Rachel Nyagondwe-Fiedler (2005:31), writing from

the Chewa context in Malawi, argues that it is necessary to uphold cultural values that encourage women to have power over sexual affairs. This is crucial especially in the context of HIV.

2.3. Chapter Summary

The main purpose of this chapter was to give a brief exposition of the *Imbusa* ritual and to provide an explanation for the connection between the status of Bemba women in marriage and the ritual. In this chapter I have demonstrated the ambivalent nature of the *Imbusa* ritual. On the one hand, the *Imbusa* teaching encourages self-esteem and self-reliance of the women, while on the other hand, because of its non-dialogical method of teaching, it disempowers women. Nevertheless, the ritual remains crucial among the Bemba people because it is one of the rituals that have persisted and endured through centuries and it is carried even to Bemba women in the diaspora as authentic premarital teaching.

The next chapter discusses and justifies the research design, methodology and methods of data production and analysis used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

In the previous chapter I gave a brief exposition of the *Imbusa* ritual and established its connection to the status of Bemba women in marriage. I have argued that while on the one hand the ritual's aim is to teach young women self-confidence, on the other hand, because of its monological approach, it prepares women for subservient roles in marriage. In this chapter I discuss and justify the methodological case for the selection and use of specific procedures in carrying out the research. The current chapter discusses the methodology that was utilized during the process of the research and outlines the research design used in this study. The research methodology is understood as a systematic process of discovering why people behave as they do (in this section it is in order to discover how and why Bemba women behave as they do in marriage settings) (Anderson 1998:8). The process of discovering how and why Bemba married women behave as they do is reflected in the methods used to gather and analyse data. The type of research necessary for this study was a qualitative method grounded in the theoretical frameworks of critical feminist theory. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the procedures used in collecting and analysing the data. Included in this discussion are sampling strategies and ethical considerations. I will start with my position as the researcher.

3.1. Positionality of the Researcher

It is essential for researchers to ascertain their position in the research (Jackson 1993:211). Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger (2007:268) explains that in feminist conversations about fieldwork, reflexivity has often implied analyses of how the creation of ethnographic knowledge is shaped by the shifting, contextual, and relational contours of the researcher's social identity or in the way one situates or positions herself with respect to the subjects. And thinking through the ways in which various identities may influence and shape research encounters, processes and outcomes.

This is because declaring one's standpoint in the research demonstrates the capability that the researcher has in influencing the research. This means that the researcher should not only have necessary skills and competence but must also demonstrate rigor in the whole research process to improve the credibility of the research (Mushimbwe 2009: 152). Being a Bemba married woman and a mother who has gone through the *Imbusa* rite was crucial in building trust and relationship with the participants. Having undergone *cisungu* at the age of 12 years when I reached puberty and receiving *Imbusa* teachings when I was 22 years old just before my wedding has given me knowledge of what the teachings are about. In order to avoid being biased in collecting data, I allowed the participants to narrate their *Imbusa* experiences in order to make them "subjects of their experiences rather than as objects of research" (Chase and Bell 1994: 64). This was significant in giving women a place to tell their story and raise their voice to what is dehumanizing, and affirm what enhances their lives. In addition, it helped me to set aside my personal beliefs, exercise self-control over my prejudice and consider different interpretations to be just as significant for the research (Denscombe 2007). Since I was aiming at "collecting rich, holistic and real data" from women, I used mixed methods with a focus on individuals since each individual has a unique way of constructing their experience differently (Mushimbwe 2009:154). The next section discusses this paradigm as used in this research.

3.2. Mixed Methods

My study employed a combination of research methods to gather data from Bemba married women within Pietermaritzburg who have undergone *Imbusa* initiation rites. The aim was to understand their views about the ways in which the *Imbusa* ritual contributes to the subjugation of women in marriage. Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992:24) have argued that the use "of multiple-data collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data". Mixed methods as a methodological approach from a transformative stance is a technique of use in integrating different methods "that allow for the collection and analysing of data about Bemba married women with special emphasis on issues of power that can influence the achievement of social justice and avoidance of oppression" (Donna Mertens cited in Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007:120). In other words, it is a method that combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques,

methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004:17). The following are the two methods used in the research.

3.2.1. Critical Qualitative Method

Gary Anderson (1998:90) has argued that “the intent (of qualitative research) is to uncover the implicit meaning in a particular situation from one or more perspectives”. A common thread to all these women is that they have undergone the *Imbusa* initiation rite and have been trying to make sense of it in their marriages. In this sense, the qualitative paradigm was chosen because it satisfies the purpose of this research study: to inquire about the contribution of *Imbusa* ritual to the subjugation of women in marriage. Kevin Durrheim (1999:47) explains that qualitative research is collecting data in written or spoken language and pinpointing and grouping themes from the research. This method is concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. Thus, it was significant that the research be done using feminist interviewing which is described by Shulamit Reinharz (1992) as an appropriate strategy in critical research for engaging participants to reflect on their reality and giving them a voice. Reinharz (1992:19) further explains that feminist interviewing permits women to put their experiences in their own words instead of the researcher’s, which lets women tell their own story, and not letting others tell it on their behalf. This study used spoken language in collecting data among the Zambian married women living in Pietermaritzburg. Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (1995:19) outline three underlying approaches to qualitative interviews: culture, which determines how the interview is understood, the interviewer’s cultural understanding and emotions, which impact the interview, and then interviewers try not to dominate the interview in order to give the participants’ voice a place. As a married woman who knows and understands the *Imbusa* initiation rite, cultural understanding was not a hindrance as there was clear understanding of terms used in the rite. Lawrence Neumann (1994:317) cogently explains that qualitative research “gives the reader a feel for social settings” in that its reports often contain detailed description of the study matter. This is because interaction with the study participants is relational and conversational. The study participants are not seen as statistics, rather they are seen as human beings whose voice and contribution as well as understanding of a particular social concern

is heard and given place to be heard. Interestingly, Rubin and Rubin (1995:56) explain that qualitative research contains rich information to build theories that describe a phenomenon “from the examples and experiences collected during the interview”. It is for this reason that the study employed a qualitative approach in order to hear the views of married Zambian women who have had a first-hand *Imbusa* initiation rite and hear their views of the *Imbusa* teachings because even in diaspora, they continue to teach young brides-to-be using the equivalent of the *Imbusa* initiation rite.

Feminist scholars have long argued that individual interviews are valuable for uncovering women’s perspectives. As a Bemba Zambian woman who has undergone the *Imbusa* teachings, I know that the *Imbusa* teachings are secretive and those who undergo it know that it is not to be shared with anyone. Thus, by using feminist approach, I gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their stories and experiences of *Imbusa* that they may have never shared with anyone. During the process of interviewing, I observed that for some women, it was still not easy to be able to share their story completely. Feminist research is further explained as research where women’s diverse desires, proficiencies and concepts “are valid in their own right, and androcentricity – man-as-the-norm – stops being the only recognised frame of reference for human beings” (Klein 1983:89). Hence, my focus on how *Imbusa* initiation rites shape who women become in marriage aims at how women perceive the *Imbusa* rite and how they would want it to be done.

3.2.2. Literature-Based Approach

The secondary method in this research is the literature-based method. This means that I have used a non-empirical method as a secondary means of collecting data. This involved an extensive literature search. This was significant in the quest to understand the history of the *Imbusa* and what is written on the subject thus far. This required wide consultation of written sources from the library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and other theological libraries within Pietermaritzburg. These various libraries were utilized to give the researcher a broader pool of data to allow for a variety of perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. This also ensured that the issue was not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allowed for multiple facets of the

phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter and Jack 2008:544). The sources consulted in this study include books, journals, theses, papers, other published and unpublished materials and internet sources on the *Imbusa* and various views of African women theologians with regard to the contribution of culture to the oppression of women in Africa. In what follows, I give a description of the research participants, why they were selected, and how the sampling was done.

3.3. The Research Participants and Sampling

As explained in chapter one, this study is located in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. As a result of the vast geographical area of Pietermaritzburg, I focused my study on fifteen of the Zambian married women who have gone through *Imbusa* rituals and are living within the town centre, Scottsville and Bisley-Pelham areas. These are educated and working Zambian women living in Pietermaritzburg. The study sample consisted of educated and working, married women as research participants. This is due to the fact that rituals and initiation rites are usually thought to be only relevant to rural women who may not have the necessary skills or competence to refuse or negotiate the rites as shown in chapter one and two. The selection of these participants was based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the *Imbusa* initiation rite as a teaching and preparation for women entering into marriage in Zambia. The assumption was that *Imbusa* initiation rite is a space where married women's identity and wellbeing is shaped. As shown in chapter one and two, *Imbusa* rites could be a safe space for women to construct their liberated identities. Consequently, the research participants were selected to uncover how they understand and perceive the *Imbusa* initiation rite having undergone it because they were the right people to explain their views.

Prior to the fieldwork, a letter of invitation was sent to the study participants seeking their permission and informed consent after the introduction. Initially, there were women that I personally know as acquaintances whom I had approached and they showed interest in taking part in the study. These are the ones who suggested more married women who would be interested in participating in the study. Some women were willing to take part in the interview as soon as I told them about my research interest, and they said they were ready to be interviewed right there and

then. I had to explain that there was a procedure that I needed to follow before I could interview them. The research was conducted between September and October 2012 as soon as the proposal was approved. The nature of the research demanded a convenience and snowball sampling tactic.

3.3.1. Convenience and Snowball Sampling

Durrheim (1999:49) explains that the purpose of a sample is to decide on a group that represents the people being studied to come up with appropriate results. Due to the fact that as a researcher I did not know many Zambian married women who have gone through *Imbusa* ritual living in Pietermaritzburg and that most of the ones I was introduced to were very busy women, convenience sampling was inevitable. Convenience sampling selects participants out of their availability with no previous rationale (Durrheim 1999:50). Thus, I was introduced to a number of Zambian married women and I verbally presented them with my research interest, to which some showed interest and others were not so eager because the teachings are supposed to be secret, not to be exposed to all. Others felt that as a result of them becoming Christians, *Imbusa* was pagan and they did not wish to deal with pagan issues. In fact, such people would have been even more interesting to interview so that they could unlock those secrets or share the pagan nature of *Imbusa*. The fact that I was introduced to several women by my acquaintances led further to the use of the snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling as explained by Norman Blaikie (2010:179) is built on an analogy to the snowball which starts very small and grows bigger and bigger as it rolls down the wet snow, therefore gathering up more snow. It is also called network, chain referral or reputation sampling (Blaikie 2010:179). My selection also grew as I was introduced and interacted with prospective study participants. Resulting from the links I had with three married acquaintances and the links they also had with other Zambian women, my study participants grew. Bridget Masaiti (2007:63) has explained that “Snowball sampling uses a middle person to introduce the interviewer to the interviewee, thereby initiating some trust”. This for me is correct in that I was introduced as a fellow Zambian and therefore the trust was built, because had I been from another country I would have been suspected of wanting to “steal” information and probably taint it. Similarly, had I been an unmarried woman, I may have not been received well because *Imbusa* teachings are for married

women, especially because sex dominates the teachings. In fact, I also learnt that some of these women are also involved in carrying out *Imbusa* teachings while in diaspora, which made our meeting even more interesting. A rapport was built with the participants that I was introduced to and I met with them prior to the interview just to gain the trust and get to know each other better. It must be stressed that these participants were chosen because they have pertinent information on the subject of *Imbusa* not just because they are women; they had something to contribute to the research. As married women who have undergone *Imbusa* teachings and are also involved in teaching others while in diaspora, their insights were critical. I used the same in-depth interviews with the ten Zambian women who had given consent to be interviewed. Initially there were fifteen women who had agreed to the interview, but five later pulled out for one reason or the other. The most common reason they gave was that they were too busy. The ages of those that were interviewed ranged between twenty-three and forty-five years, and they have been married between two and twenty-five years.

3.4. Data Production and Analysis

Data production took the form of in-depth, face to face interviews. As mentioned above (see chapter one), study participants were enlisted through both convenience and snowball sampling (see chapter one and 3.4.1). The first three women whom I knew personally gave me the phone numbers of other married Zambian women whom they believed would be willing to take part in the study. I firstly telephoned these women and we would decide on a day to meet in person. Usually the meeting place would be the home of the woman who had given me their telephone number. I met other women when I just visited a woman I know, and there I presented my research interest. In fact I met one woman at City Harvest Church, a Pentecostal Church situated at the centre of town in Pietermaritzburg, when I went for a dinner that was organised by the same Church. She just walked up and greeted me and my husband and explained that she had heard us speaking in Bemba. She was also with her husband and when we started a conversation, I found an opportunity to ask if she would be interested in my research, to which she agreed and said she would let me know of a suitable day and time as she is a busy woman.

When I contacted each woman that was suggested to me by other women, I explained how I got her name and phone number. In most cases, the women who suggested the names of these women would have already spoken to them before I contacted them about my research interest. I then clarified the purpose for the study and I left the women to give the time and day that was convenient for them after giving them the letter of invitation and consent forms. With the verbal agreement to take part in the study, I gave each verbally consented participant a letter of invitation to participate (see Appendix 4) and two copies of the consent form (see Appendix 2), one copy which was signed and returned to me and the other to be kept for her records. After receiving the signed consent forms and my proposal having been approved, I began the data collection using face-to-face in-depth interviewing.

The interviews took place in a place and at a time of the participant's choice. Each participant used their real names in the interview but did not want their names to be mentioned in the study. The reason they used their real names during the audio recording was because I had explained to them that the only people who would listen to the recordings were I as researcher and my supervisor. Interviews varied in length from thirty minutes to one hour.

The interviews were focused on the construction of women's identity in marriage via *Imbusa* initiation rites; I thus used an interview guide (see Appendix 3) comprising of questions designed to effect answers to the research questions. The open-ended type of this semi-structured interview assisted me to explore various topics and gave the participants the opportunity to voice their feelings of the *Imbusa* rite. Knowing that the content of *Imbusa* is often the same, I anticipated similar stories, of course varying in few places from individual to individual, like the number of *banacimbusa* present for the teaching. The interview questions were prepared from general to specific and, where necessary, I probed for details and clarification. I had, before the interview, asked the participants if I could take notes for the sake of highlighting some important phrases and words that could need clarification or emphasis, therefore beside audio-recording, I took down notes as well. I paid attention to what was said and unsaid during and after the interview. After the interviews, most women would openly tell me about their personal marital struggles (most of these women were told

that I am married to a pastor, and they sought someone to listen to them and not necessarily counsel them) and added more to what was in the interview as well.

3.4.1. Face to Face In-depth Interviews

In conducting these interviews, I intended to reveal the insider's point of view from the study participants who have had first-hand initiation rites in *Imbusa*. After the introduction, I asked the participants to tell me about their *Imbusa* initiation rite; this was because I wanted each participant to reflect on their experience and refresh their memory of this rite as we delved into the research. Anthony Balcomb (1999:49) explains that telling stories brings meaning, and things that occur need to be explained. Further, Balcomb (1999:51) stresses that "stories are the domain of all human beings who want not only to make sense but to open up possibilities in life" because stories are not just about what happened but what could happen as well. This, among many other reasons, is why I asked my study participants to give a narrative of their *Imbusa* experience. All participants were asked whether the interview should be done in English or Bemba. They all preferred that English be used; however, where emphasis was needed, the Bemba term was most often used. Participants received a copy of my analyses of the interviews at their own request in order to respond. They were also given a chance to probe, clarify, and give extra data where necessary as well as to correct where my analyses were seemingly incorrect.

3.4.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of giving meaning to data. As Balcomb (1999:51) has explained, narratives are a way of giving meaning to life, thus analysing collected data is a way of giving meaning to the stories and conversations between researcher and study participants. The data was analysed using the notes taken and audio-recordings during the face to face interviews with the study participants. These were typed and coded thematically. Using Musimbi Kanyoro's (2002) African feminist cultural hermeneutics, the data was analysed to show that culture (*Imbusa*) shapes women's wellbeing in marriage. Feminist cultural hermeneutics was used as a lens through which to uncover Bemba and Zambian women's perception of the teachings of *Imbusa* as women who have undergone

and experienced its results in marriage. Similarly, Kanyoro (2002:64) explains cultural hermeneutics as an investigation into how culture and cultural practices constructs people's view of reality in a certain context. In the same way, cultural hermeneutics in this study was used to reflect on the Zambian women who have gone through the *Imbusa* initiation rite and its impact on their experiences in marriage. Furthermore, Kanyoro (2002:15) has contended that African women, as custodians of culture, have often passed harmful practices to other women in trying to safeguard culture and traditional practices. This, Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2006:11) have built on, stating that life-giving aspects of culture must be upheld while life-denying aspects are rejected. Similarly, in the interviews that were conducted among educated, working class women of Zambia living in Pietermaritzburg, it was discovered that there are some life-giving aspects in *Imbusa* while there are also life-denying aspects for women in the *Imbusa* teachings. Therefore, using the feminist cultural hermeneutics tool, the data was analysed thematically as arising themes were observed from the interviews. Analysing data in themes provided a way in which I could understand the findings from the interviews of how *Imbusa* has constructed and shaped who women become as they enter into marriage.

3.5. Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that not all women who had verbally accepted to take part in the interview were able to participate for various reasons; in total, five participants declined the interview at the last minute. Further, participants were unable to make time for focus group as their schedules could not allow it. I made several attempts to arrange for a focus group at different dates and times to no avail, and since my invitation letter stated that study participants were allowed to leave the interview at any time, some of them reminded me of that fact and I was left with no option but to drop the focus group meeting. Therefore, a focus group meeting was not successful and only face to face interviews were conducted.

The second limitation was that if the interview was done in Zambia, it could have yielded many participants. Having conducted this research in Pietermaritzburg among working women meant first of all that there were few women to be interviewed and then that meeting was out of their

convenience. There were also cases where the participants kept on changing the agreed time for the interviews. Agreeing to the changes meant a cost of time, money, and travel effort on my part. There is a saying among the Bemba people that *uupamfwe eulwa necibi*, which is literally translated as ‘the one who is in desperate need is the one who will fight with the door’. Therefore as the one who desperately needed their participation, I had to agree to their changes. It would have been profitable to do a comparative study of the perceptions of educated working women and rural women about *Imbusa* initiation (see chapter four).

The third limitation was that some participants would often divert from the question intentionally and unintentionally. Others were not direct on the subject of sex in marriage; they would give a very short answer and showed that they did not want to talk about this subject. In these cases I had to gently probe for clarification and redirect the interview. This study was limited to Zambian women living and working in Pietermaritzburg.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The participants were given a letter of invitation after the verbal agreement as well as the consent forms to be signed. Accordingly, Douglas Wassenaar (1999:63) has explained that it is important to keep the dignity and welfare of the study participants above the research interest. Therefore, I respected the time changes from the participants and agreed to whenever it was convenient for them even if it cost me time and money. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided by signing consent forms as well as not using their real names and personal information that would identify them; the names in this study are fictional ones. Participants were told that there would not be any financial gains from the interview and that they were free to pull out of the interviews at any time, thus, the focus group meeting could not be arranged as it was not convenient for almost all the women. The participants were also assured of confidentiality; the only people who would listen to the audio-recorded interview would be me as a researcher and my supervisor.

3.7. Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter was on the methods used to conduct the research study. Included in the chapter were the rationale and description of the mixed methods methodological approach, a description of the selection process of study participants, and a description and rationale for the interview process of data collection. In short, the chapter thoroughly explained the research design and methodology used in this study as well as how data was collected and analysed. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the analysis of the interviews by exploring whether and what identities are constructed during the *Imbusa* initiation rites.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMBUSA RITUAL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN ZAMBIA

4. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the methodology that was used in the process of data production and analysis was sketched. The previous chapter outlined the research design as well. The present chapter discusses the findings of the research that was done based on the themes that arose from the interviews. Thematic analysis was employed in order to understand whether and what identities are constructed from *Imbusa* initiation rites. Themes arising from the data collection of the face-to-face in-depth interviews from the *Zambian* married women's understanding of *Imbusa* have been critically analysed in this chapter. Since the *Imbusa* initiation rite is cultural, I have utilized feminist cultural hermeneutics as a tool that seeks to uphold life-giving elements of culture while at the same time rejecting life-denying cultural aspects. As explained in chapter three, ten *Zambian* women instead of fifteen (as chapter one indicates because some women declined the interview) were interviewed and their views of *Imbusa* recorded. These women were chosen because often it is assumed that rituals are performed on rural uneducated women who are unable to think critically on the rituals and would just accept everything as they are being taught (as explained in chapter one). In presenting the findings I am guided by Martine Terre-Blanche *et al.* (2006:321) argument that "key to doing a good interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding". To this end, this chapter aims at presenting themes reflecting the female identities that are constructed during the process of initiation. By asking women to talk about their *Imbusa* experiences, I sought to learn about their experiences and how the ritual has constructed their identities as married women. In what follows I show three ways in which *Imbusa* constructs women's identities.

4.1. Guardian of “Classified Bedroom Stories”

The women who were interviewed had received the teachings on secrecy in marriage and apparently most, if not all of them, believed it was the right way to living in marriage. *Banacimbusa* teaches that there are things that cannot leave the bedroom door and that women must learn to keep secrets. Emphasis is made that not everything can be told or shared with other people. One of the participants in her narrative had this to say,

One lady ...tied a... how can I describe it? *Kwati akafulukutu* (like a small luggage)... *basenda* (she took) something *mukatanbala* (in a head scarf), *bachita akafulukutu* (and made a small luggage) so, then she went and tied it to the door {knob} of the bedroom, then she said to me, “go and open that door and go outside”, I went I opened the door and I went outside, she said close the door and I closed the door, she said “come back in” I opened the door and I came back in. she said to me “did that *kafulukutu* (luggage) follow you when you went outside?” I said no, “but were you able to open the door with the *kafulukutu* (small luggage) on?” I said yes, then she said ‘there are things that you will find out in marriage that you won’t be able to take out of your bedroom door, if you found out that your husband wets the bed, that story must remain in the bedroom’. And you see because it was visual, eighteen years later I can still remember it. I can remember that there are some stories that I cannot take outside; these are *classified bedroom stories*...

These “*classified bedroom stories*”, I believe, include husband beating wife (as one song says), although none of the participants spoke about that, but the songs that are used for teaching suggest this possibility. Another woman also narrated how she was taught on keeping secrets in the home; her *banacimbusa* also used visual aids to teach her about this concept. This is what they said,

They had a pot and they asked me ‘what is in the pot?’ I said I don’t know...so she removed the lid and I was able to see what was inside and they said to me ‘someone cannot know what is in this pot until this pot is opened’ so they said basically, even as a married person, whatever is discussed they don’t really advise that you go and share with other people. And as a married woman you are not supposed to be telling everyone what is happening in your house to say no this is what happens in my house... you know my husband does this and that. It’s not good as a *woman you have to learn to put a lid on your heart, you have to cover it*, don’t just open anyhow, yeah. That’s the first thing they said.

This response reveals the fatalistic nature of marriage in *Zambian* (and other African) contexts. The majority of *Zambian* women continue in abusive marriages because *Imbusa* creates a deep sense of resignation to women's situations. Noting from these women's narratives and responses, the majority of *Zambian* women live believing that they cannot share certain things that are happening in their bedroom to other people. This seems to imply that regardless of what the situation is, a woman ought to live through it without letting anyone know that there are problems. Emerging from their responses is the fact that they need to cover their husbands' misdeeds or things that they do not like about their husbands. A woman's wellbeing is endangered in this kind of space, because she is supposed to smile when she really wants to cry. It seems the value that the *Imbusa* attaches "to marriage is more than the value attached" to the woman's life (Phiri and Nadar 2009:13). This all has to do with the wife respecting her husband. The participants expressed that they were taught so much about how they should treat their husbands; none of them were taught how their husbands would reciprocate their actions and treatment. In this regard women keep bedroom secrets at their own peril. The question is: at what point can women keep a secret or seek help? This question is important in that among the "classified bedroom stories", it is possible that certain sexual or even violent behaviours that the husband may portray must be kept secret. These secrets vary in range and it is inevitable that women keep secret issues that could in fact be life-denying to them.

It is believed that the bedroom is a sacred place because it keeps secrets that happen between the two people in that bedroom. Women are therefore taught to bear so much and be silent about it. One participant explained the sacredness of the bedroom,

..and they also said to me because these are bedroom stories, therefore, your bedroom is a sacred place, it becomes not only a place where you have pleasure with your husband, where you rest, but it's also a place of deep secrets and sometimes these secrets not even your children or your sisters will know.

What is clear from this statement is that one of the qualities of being an ideal *Zambian* married woman is the ability to keep secrets no matter how bad and overbearing they may be. This is the kind of knowledge that a *Zambian* woman would enter into marriage with. In fact, while *banacimbusa* are busy preparing the woman to keep secrets, the man does not receive such instructions, for as

soon as he discovers that his bride has not elongated her labia for example, the bedroom is no longer a sacred place because he would take her back to *banacimbusa* for that purpose. The sacredness of the bedroom then seems to me to be disempowering for women rather than empowering them because the concern in the whole “secret-keeping sacredness” of the bedroom is about protecting one’s husband from society. There is no mutuality and reciprocation of this secret keeping sacredness of the bedroom. In the same vein, the next theme is concerned with sex.

4.2. Non-Negotiating and Sex-Object Self

Sex is the crucial and dominant teaching in the *Imbusa* initiation rite. It occupies a large amount of the teaching and took up more space than any of the other topics. Unfortunately, it focuses squarely on satisfying the husband. Since it is believed that sex is the “big glue and indicator”, most Zambian women spend much of their married life trying to satisfy their husbands. One woman expressed the sentiment that,

...after you’ve finished (the sexual act) then you must kneel down and (claps her hands) *zikomo* (thank you). You thank him because he has desired you and that’s an honourable thing, if he can desire you. And they said to me if he desires you every day, it’s an honourable thing, if he desires you once every week you must start to get worried, so already what they were saying to me is that this *sex is a big glue and a big indicator* of how your husband loves you or how your husband wants you, if he doesn’t want you, you must look at it as a red light, what is it that is going on? What is happening? That was very important.

Sexual relationship is dependent so much on the husband desiring his wife, indicating that should he not desire his wife, then there is a problem. In this sense, *Imbusa* reduces the woman to a sexual object. If the husband does not want sex, the woman becomes insecure and fearful. Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2009:14) rightly argue that “the resignation of this woman to her fate of being married lies in this traditional worldview that it is her destiny to get married and to satisfy her husband’s needs”. This collaborates with the notion of sex as an indicator, providing a red or a green light. The woman is socialised to believe that only the husband has needs and her duty is to meet them. This is to say that the husband’s sexual needs come before and above those of the wife’s. Can

it be argued that women are not prepared to enjoy sex in their marriages? One participant in responding to this question argued that,

I think there was no aspect in the teaching where they taught me to enjoy (laughter continues) it's like most of the time they would ask me how to wriggle my waist for him, yeah like my part was not mentioned like I have to enjoy the sexual encounter but most of the things that they taught me were aimed at uh making him enjoy the whole act for example they taught me how to elongate the labia and whatever, and for me that was... it's something that is practiced in my context but it's meant to satisfy the husband that's one thing I picked from it yeah. Sex in the teachings I got is purely for the pleasure of the husband.

The above narrative contradicts Thera Rasing's (1995:27) argument that among the Bemba people men and women are expected to enjoy a full sex life. According to the narratives of the Zambian women, they were taught to please their husbands and nothing was said about whether as women they should also receive pleasure from their husbands. Therefore, in telling their own stories, women of Zambia have shown that there are power dynamics at play when it comes to marriage and the marriage act or act of marriage. Sex is a measurement by which a woman would know that her marriage is working or not. The frequency that husband and wife have sex determines whether or not she is following the teachings. In this regard, then women are taught to be in a subservient role because when the husband is not happy with the wife's performance in bed, he has the right to go back to her *banacimbusa* and report this as well as ask them to re-teach her as shown in chapter two. In fact, the woman is told not to negotiate for sex.

When asked whether Zambian women are taught to negotiate for safer sex if they suspect their husband of being unfaithful (this is in relation to the bedroom as a place of deep secrets), two of the participants that gave a narrative relatively close to one another, revealing that the husbands' sexuality is not to be questioned,

Uh the traditional African woman or Zambian woman in my context is... it's hard for them to dialogue for safer sex because basically the teachings are telling you to satisfy him and if he won't be satisfied when he wears a condom then you have no say about it and in the first place you as a woman are not supposed to ask for sex

that's what I was taught...I don't even have the power to negotiate for safer sex so in some way I don't think they help so much to empower in sexual life...

This resonates very well with the observation by Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) that what “many HIV & AIDS activists and scholars have picked up in the fight against the spread of HIV, is the inability of women to negotiate for safer sex, in cases of unfaithfulness, because of cultural constraints”. Almost all the women said they were not taught to say ‘NO!’ or to negotiate for safe sex except for one participant, who said,

With me because they used to say...‘at least you... these days you girls have been to school so you can tell your husband this, but before we never used to’.

This shows that *Imbusa*, like African culture itself, is not monolithic or static but always going through the process of transformation. The time when the woman had no power to make decisions about her sexuality is over. There is a need for a reciprocal or mutual ownership in marriage (Phiri and Nadar 2009:13). In *Imbusa*, even initiating sex was always the man's duty and the woman, even when she had sexual desire, would keep quiet. Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) call for “an African feminist ethics of sexuality” promoting not just safe practices but in affirming a just marriage. I develop this theme further below (see chapter five).

4.3. Self-Subordinate

Connected to non-negotiation in sexual matters is the notion of self-subordination which results in dehumanization. It is believed that an ideal wife is a subordinate wife. This is connected with the notion of ‘soft-self’. One woman explains that during *Imbusa* women are taught to speak in a soft voice to their husbands. The woman should not speak harshly to her husband because that is disrespectful and insubordination. Another woman states that,

Yeah! I think I will pick up one song which they sang to me which says for me to eat good things from my husband; I have to be soft or submissive towards him. I think it goes like *kulya twalumeni matete alundanaka*, literally meaning for you to eat good things from your husband, you just have to be submissive toward him. So, firstly

from that song I picked up the aspect of total dependence on the husband because for me to eat good things from him I have to be good to him... this promotes dependency on the husband because the woman would be dependent on him for good things... and does not promote submission on both sides only calls for submission on the woman's side.

Since such kind of marriages lack mutual submission, the husband perceives himself to be superior and consequently treats his wife as inferior. This perception does not promote self-reliance (I return to this theme in chapter five) for women but creates dependency syndrome. This condition suggests a form of self-subordination to the husband who in turn controls the wellbeing and destiny of his wife. Dependency leads to vulnerability and oppression as the woman loses the capacity and potential to determine her own destiny. It also leads to dehumanization, a situation where the woman is perceived as the man's property. In fact, one woman remembered that during *Imbusa*, the young bride is forced to roll down on the wet ground with only underwear and if her father does not rescue her with a good amount of money, they beat her with a stick. "They should always beat you if you are not doing the right thing with a fresh stick, why a fresh one? Because you have to be obedient." This is dehumanization. Another woman observes that,

I think one of the teachings I found to be very dehumanizing so to say is ... the fact they taught me that after each sexual encounter with my husband I have to clean his private parts [penis] yes. I have to clean him but then at the end of it all I have to thank him. I think that for me was a bit dehumanizing because both of us would have been working towards something but then I have to lay down and clap my hands and thank him that was a bit dehumanizing...

This is clear that the woman is prepared not for equality but to maintain a low profile at every level. She does not have to initiate sex but she has to fall prostrate to the man for initiating it. In this way, the man is made to feel even more powerful. In addition, the woman is forced to become passive and obedient to her husband even when she is being abused and she knows that he is being unfaithful. The participant gave an example that,

...they would teach me on not denying my husband sex and they'd sing a song like uhm (*motenda, motenda, motenda, motenda, motenda lume akabwela motenda, motenda akalala kunjja motenda*) in other words, I must still give him the best of sex, to "tenda" is still to

dance for him when you are in bed, now they are saying to me even if he comes late, don't just be laying there like a log, even if he sleeps outside [has extra marital affair], or he shows signs of unfaithfulness, now me am getting shocked am thinking duh... But these are the teachings that have been handed down to them.

Her explanation of the teachings she received show that she was concerned about her wellbeing in the marriage; she questioned the teachings even though she could not verbally ask her *banacimbusa*. Yet this is a classic example of how women are taught to live “graciously” under difficulties in their own home/bedroom. While respect is a crucial part of any marriage or any relationship, there should be a place and time when a woman can come out and speak to someone about her experience, especially to her *nacimbusa* who is her marriage mentor. The *Imbusa* teaching, according to the women's narratives, does not seem to grant that space. This respect ought to be reciprocated as well, because from the narratives, it seems that only the wife is to respect and the husband to receive respect.

For some women who were interviewed, acquiring *Imbusa* knowledge and being submissive was perceived as empowering as they knew how to go and behave in marriage. While the women that were interviewed had undergone *Imbusa* initiation rites at different times ranging from 1982- 2011, the trends in the teachings seem not to have been changed. The social changes as well as many other changes that have taken place have not effected change in the *Imbusa* teachings. In fact, I would assert having heard the women's stories, that it is both ways; there is an empowering aspect and there is an aspect that is not so empowering in the *Imbusa* teachings. And mostly, the interviewed women would say it was empowering because they knew how they were supposed to behave in marriage. One of the participants in fact said ‘I knew what my place was in that marriage’. But that was accompanied by some contradictions - that the husband is untouchable, he is like a master and his wife a slave. This observation she made does not state empowering women, it in fact disempowers them. Furthermore, the woman is expected to be morally responsible by keeping herself from being unfaithful even when the husband is unfaithful. The differences in the women's opinion about the teaching show that the *Imbusa* teaching seems to have no uniform set of teaching. This means that the content of the teaching depends too often on the *banacimbusa*. There is a need for

feminist *banacimbusa* or a feminist approach to Imbusa in order to promote a life-giving premarital teaching.

4.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the ten educated and working Zambian women's understandings of *Imbusa* teachings. Their opinions are almost the same about the fact that they believe the teachings to be empowering. However, I have argued in this chapter that empowerment is a relative term, because the interviewed women all stated that the teachings were empowering for them in that they went into marriage knowing what their place was, as one of the participants narrated. *Imbusa* teachings emphasise and focus mostly on sexual intercourse between husband and wife. All the participants explained that they were taught that there are classified bedroom stories that they do not need to share with other people, and that being desired by their husbands is an honour and if their husbands did not desire them it was an indicator that something is wrong. In addition, they all expressed discomfort with the fact that all the teachings are loaded on a woman. As stated in the previous chapter, the crucial aspect in the *Imbusa* teachings is that of "the bedroom" as most if not all participants put it. *Banacimbusa* may not be educated, they however are custodians of *Imbusa* cultural teachings and even educated women cannot question the teachings.

CHAPTER FIVE
FRAMEWORK FOR LIFE-GIVING MARRIAGE: A GENDER JUSTICE
IMBUSA

5. Introduction

The previous chapter showed that the *Imbusa* rite focuses too much on the husband's needs at the expense of the wife. The teachings revolve around the issues of sexual intercourse in which the woman is taught how to satisfy her husband. The *Imbusa* rite is a strong tool used in the construction of female identities. Developing from the previous chapter, in the current chapter the aim is to develop an approach to *Imbusa* that aims to be holistic, that sets to affirm life within the context of marriage for women in Zambia. The time is ripe for a reappraisal of *Imbusa* teaching for life-giving.

All the interviewed women clearly stated that the *Imbusa* initiation rite is a very important space for Zambian culture; their dilemma is that women only are the recipients of the teachings. What was taught to a woman in two weeks to one month will be summarized in an hour for the man and not all the teachings will be given. In this chapter, I will grapple with questions such as, what should be the basis of life-giving marriage and *Imbusa*? What type of *Imbusa* teachings are needed in the context of gender justice and women's rights? And what types of *banacimbusa* are needed in order to have life-giving marriages and *Imbusa* initiation rites? As pointed out above (see 2.1.1) the *Imbusa* initiation rite is a method which the community utilises for premarital counselling of women for viable marriages. It is not only the initiator who benefits from this institution but it also works as a marriage enrichment program where every woman who has undergone the ritual has an opportunity to refresh themselves and teach, while at the same time they are also learning. This means that *Imbusa* teachings are not just for the benefit of those being initiated but *banacimbusa* and the present women as well. Therefore, it cannot be over-emphasised that the *Imbusa* space has to be more open to include the current issues under discussion and debate concerning women in Africa. In this chapter, I propose a basis and structure (framework) of *Imbusa* teachings for life-giving marriage.

This is not in any way exhaustive. And because *banacimbusa* are central to the Imbusa initiation rite and the crucial subject of the *Imbusa* teachings is sex, I propose to focus on the three critical components of *Imbusa*: first, I propose an African feminist *banacimbusa*. Second, since *Imbusa* is a form of teaching, there is a need for African feminist *Imbusa* pedagogy. Third is the need for a holistic approach to sexuality, since much of the *Imbusa* teaching floats around sexuality.

5.1. The Need for African Feminist *Banacimbusa*

The proposal for a feminist *banacimbusa*, in the context of gender justice, is made with a view to constructing a life-giving marriage. A just-marriage cannot be conceptualised without acknowledging the role of *banacimbusa*. *Banacimbusa* are crucial to the *Imbusa* initiation rites and the construction of women's identity in marriage and it is therefore vital that their role in the feasibility of a just marriage (life-giving marriage) is articulated here. The question is what kind of *banacimbusa* are needed for envisioning a life-affirming marriage? I propose an African feminist *banacimbusa*.

An African feminist *banacimbusa* will be concerned with achieving gender justice. For this to happen, *banacimbusa* need to undergo a process of transformation, consciousness-raising and internalization of theories from African feminist scholars. I define a feminist *banacimbusa* as one who decisively and consciously works to dismantle patriarchy and hierarchical structures in marriage and society in order to foster gender equity, to awaken women to oppression and social imbalance, and to empower women to stand up for their rights by exposing them to resources necessary for envisioning equality in marriage (Robertson 1994:11). Three ways in which this can be achieved can be identified as follows:

Firstly, there is a need for progressive *banacimbusa*. Since *banacimbusa* are central to the *Imbusa* teachings, there is the need that they keep up with times. There have not been changes in the content between the interviewed women that received their teachings in 1982 and those who received them in 2011. Two of the interviewed women observed that there is a need for the

teachings to be made more modern than they are; for example, one participant said she thinks that the “we are in an environment that is trying to empower women, more and more women are very independent, some teachings are more of the opposite of what they are trying to do”. She further expressed the need for the *Imbusa* to be shaped in a way that would modernize it, “shape better women in marriage”, because as it is currently taught, it belittles women, makes them feel like they are someone else in their work place or friend’s home, and someone else in their home where they feel belittled. Another one stated that it was in the Christian teachings that some of the things that were taught in *Imbusa* were re-taught in the modern way. Yet, *Imbusa* should be taught not just in a modern way but it needs to carry a feminist orientation. It should be influenced by contemporary calls for social justice and gender equity. It should be concerned about the equal distribution of power that would pay attention not only to gender, but to all forms of oppression and exploitation of women in society. This can only be achieved by *banacimbusa* with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice with an agenda for a socio-cultural, economic, political and religious transformation for equality and realization of human rights for the whole community. This means that *banacimbusa* with a feminist perspective will need to articulate the *Imbusa* teaching in a contextualized manner to reflect the culture and socio-political context, and at the same time reflect the global call for gender justice and human rights for all.

Secondly, this point stems from the first, there is a need for *banacimbusa* to be *schooled* and *educated* in the issues that under are current discussion among African women and even male theologians such as gender justice. If Zambian women will be helped to go into a life-giving marriage, *banacimbusa* as central actors in the *Imbusa* rite need to be aware of recent issues that African women are raising. Mercy Oduyoye (1992:10) clarifies that the people involved in the ritual practices (*banacimbusa* and initiates) are the ones who can take note and evaluate the usefulness and necessary changes for the ritual or rite. In fact it is true that culture is not static, it is constantly transforming itself as it encounters as cultures. Chammah Kaunda (2012:140), similarly discussing theological education for gender justice, stresses the need for a relevant, fruitful and life-affirming education. It is important that in order to prepare women for a life-affirming marriage, *banacimbusa* be educated on such issues that are relevant to women’s lives. If and when *banacimbusa* are schooled in issues such as gender

violence, they would teach the initiates on how to speak out against violence or any form of abuse in marriage. With the education on relevant issues concerning women, *banacimbusa* can also put ideas together and write a book for the purpose of modernized *Imbusa* initiation rites.

Thirdly, the need for a booklet containing common content of *Imbusa* teachings would be vital for coherence because one out of the ten interviewed women explained that “you know I just finished my secretarial studies that time so they used to tell me ‘at least you... these days you girls have been to school so you can tell your husband this, but before we never used to’”. The rest of the interviewed women said they were taught never to ask for sex from their husbands because it is not honourable for women to ask. It depends on the people who are teaching you. This means that although the teachings are still as they were in the distant past, there are some *banacimbusa* who will teach an uneducated woman not to ask for sex from her husband while they would teach an educated woman that she can ask because she is educated. If *banacimbusa* in Zambia could take initiative and write a booklet on such teachings with a feminist orientation, it would be very helpful in reaching and achieving life-giving marriage for Zambian women. This booklet should affirm cultural practices such as drama, clapping, singing, dancing etc., together with suggestions emerging from African women scholars. I however would encourage that *banacimbusa* themselves formulate and write the booklet to help even the up-coming *banacimbusa* on how to go about the initiation rite. The content of the *Imbusa* teachings have seemingly not changed according to the interviews; what was taught thirty years ago is still repeated. This, it can be argued, is because as initiated women, they want to show *banacimbusa* that they have kept the teachings handed down to them. This leads to the need for feminist *Imbusa* pedagogy.

5.2. An African Feminist *Imbusa* Pedagogy

From the findings of the interviews that were carried out among ten Zambian women living in Pietermaritzburg, it can be argued that *Imbusa* initiation rite is a banking system (See Freire 1996) method of teaching. As a young woman, when being taught, she is not allowed to have eye contact

with anyone and is not allowed ask questions. One participant observes that, "...reading between the lines, my husband is perfect; this is what they were not saying but which I could hear. And as a girl who had been to university there were times I would say what about him? But of course I didn't ask them because culturally it is wrong to challenge elders". This shows that there is a need to develop feminist *Imbusa* pedagogy. For a long time, *Imbusa* has utilised a banking approach where *banacimbusa* have been constantly perceived as handing down knowledge to the bride (see chapter two, 2.2.1). This form of teaching has been condemned as domesticating and not emancipating (Freire 1996). Knowledge must be perceived as a shared commodity rather than handed down. Life-giving knowledge is dialogical; such that both *banacimbusa* and the bride should think and talk together. The *Imbusa* itself must become a liberatory environment for women by suggesting a new way to be initiated into *Imbusa*. It can become a safe space of conscientizing one another in an interconnected web of relationships in critical solidarity with women who care about each other's wellbeing in a life-affirming marriage. One goal of the liberatory feminist *Imbusa* pedagogy should be to learn to respect each other rather than create fear and intimidation in young women. It should be a safe environment where the young women can express their fears and hopes, with an understanding that there is a listening ear.

Unfortunately, even asking questions is taken as disobedience and is seen as arrogance (see chapter four, 4.4, and chapter two, 2.2.1). Rachael Nyagondwe-Fiedler (2005:57) explains how the initiates' heads are bowed as they enter the house for initiation in Malawi Christianised *chinamwali* initiation. Similar to *Imbusa*, this bowing down is a sign of respect. This is the same for the Zambian women going through the initiation; they have to lightly bow their heads, avoid eye contact and not ask questions, rather just listen to *banacimbusa's* instructions and obey. This translates into the marriage because in marriage, a woman cannot challenge her husband. This is why the *Imbusa* initiation rite should be used as a dialogical space, allowing the initiates to ask questions and suggest things if possible during the teachings. By so doing, the young bride is alerted to know that even in her home, she can ask questions where she does not understand and that her input in the home is valuable and necessary. Thus, *Imbusa* teaching should be done in a participatory and democratic manner in which there is sharing of power. The aim should be to develop independence in the young woman. In this

way, *Imbusa* pedagogy will be concerned with gender justice, overcoming domination and dependency syndrome. As women find their own voices in the process of *Imbusa*, this will translate or enter into the bedroom where at present, women's sexuality is controlled by patriarchy and they are unable to negotiate about sex or ask for it from their husbands.

5.3. A Holistic Approach to Sexuality

Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2009:13) have proposed that “an African feminist ethics of sexuality is needed in order to promote safe practices in the context of HIV”. My aim in this section is to propose a framework for such ethics in the Zambian context. A holistic approach to sexuality in Africa must affirm the non-dualistic African world-view of reality. There is no dichotomy between religion and secular, spirituality and material, man and woman, husband and wife, mind and body, emotion and intellect and so on. Scholars have observed that these dualisms hold the foundation that sustains patriarchy in society (Harrison 1985:149). By overcoming them, patriarchy will fundamentally collapse and give way to mutual respect and valuing of the other. Sex in marriage is one of, if not ‘the crucial topic’ in *Imbusa* initiation rites that is taught extensively. All the ten interviewed women are in agreement that sex is the most taught during the rite; however, the whole teaching is only for women. As a “big glue and indicator” (see chapter four), sex in marriage should be for the benefit of the husband, and the wife is a passive participant. In short, the man has to enjoy sex at the expense of his wife in that even if she does not want to have it, she has no right to say no to him. On the contrary, Beverley Harrison (1985:149-50) has argued that:

The moral norm for sexual communication in a feminist ethic is a radical mutuality — the simultaneous acknowledgement of vulnerability to and need of another, the recognition of one's own power to give and receive pleasure and to call forth another's power of relation and to express one's own. The sexual ethic of patriarchy — our present operative ethic — has ownership as its formative value. We are to possess total right of access to and control of another's body-space and the fruits of another's body, if the other is female. A norm of control prevails, which is why so-called marital fidelity really means only sexual exclusivity for the female spouse.

Following the trend of this argument, I propose three principles for gender justice sexuality. These are in no way exhaustive rather they are the benchmark for *banacimbusa* and the teachings they give.

First, women should be taught a *radical mutual responsibility*. Harrison calls for *radical mutuality* as a feminist ethic for sexual communication. The radical nature of this ethic demands that both the wife and the husband are satisfied when it comes to sex in marriage without the wife being the satisfier and the husband being the satisfied. Margaret Farley (200:217) quoting Karen Lebacqz, notes that sex can be harmful even in marriage because “*eros*, the desire for another, the passion that accompanies the wish for sexual expression, makes one vulnerable...capable of being wounded”. This is the more reason why women in Zambia should be taught mutual responsibility and agreement concerning sex in marriage. Marcy Oduyoye (2006:22) cogently observes “the question of sexuality cannot avoid the relationship of men and women in marriage”. She further notes that it has been believed that a woman is to be a “monotheist” while a husband can freely worship other women’s bodies as a “polytheist” in marriage. I argue therefore that if Zambian people will reach a place of gender just sex, proper sexual relations must not be differently defined between the wife and husband (Oduyoye 2006:22). In short, husband and wife should not have different understandings of sexual relations. The wife and husband should have equal access to each other’s bodies. One of the interviewed women lamented that,

... if they [*banacimbusa*] modified it to something more modern, what is happening, like women are more... they know what they want, just to try and bring a balance to it, it would shape better women in marriage. But now because it’s a conflict of what a person is, it’s kind of like you are somebody else in your work environment, your friend’s environment but when you are at home, you feel like you are completely nothing, when you are supposed to feel the same in all spheres of life. So now if the most intimate action... act that you have between you and your husband makes you feel belittled, the whole household you are in, you literally feel you can’t make any impact in the house.

This means according to this woman that the *Imbusa* space is fitting; however, the teachings need to be modernized and catch up with current happenings in the world. This is where it is also important that men are taught how to treat and satisfy their wives. Sex must be a mutual pleasure “in the

context of genuine openness and intimacy” (Harrison 1985:87). The *Imbusa* teaching on sexuality at the moment upholds patriarchy and reinforces husband control of his wife. It denies the woman the pleasure of sex as the means of being a good wife.

Second, in relation to the point above, women should *own power to give and receive* sexual intimacy. There is a need to overcome women’s *passivity* when it comes to sex. Being passive is almost equal to not consenting especially in the context of sexual relations. If women are taught not to deny their husbands sex, it is not clear at what point they are to say no because according to the interviews, except for menstruation, a woman must give her husband sex at all costs. This means that while men own their bodies, women do not. This is one area where most Zambian women need to express their autonomy (Farley 2008:218). The liberty to say yes and no to sex with one’s husband will give Zambian women their intrinsic autonomy and also they would know that their opinions are important and valued. This means that both husband and wife are mutually participating in the sexual act without one feeling forced and violated or feeling they are a giver of pleasure only. This mutual responsibility and participation when it comes to sex gives women dignity as well. Nyambura Jane Njoroge (2002:41) affirms that when attention is not paid to women as intrinsic beings, the destruction of their God-given identity and human dignity is imminent. The majority of Zambian women need to be conscientized that being passive is not the same as being a good ideal married woman.

Third, sex is perceived as the reason for longevity in marriage and that it is up to the woman to make the marriage work. Thus, in *Imbusa*, a woman is taught that after each sexual encounter with her husband, she should clean his penis and thank him; however, the interviewed women expressed discomfort with this concept (see chapter four, 4.2). This shows that sex is for longevity of marriage for a woman, not for a man, because if as a married woman her husband does not desire her and she is unable to ask for sex then there is inequality. Thus, sexual entitlement, equality and mutual access to their bodies as wife and husband both, is significant for a life-affirming marriage. During the interview, one participant explained that the actions of her

mother during the *Imbusa* rite - she was cooking and doing many things for *banacimbusa* - indicated to her that her mother wanted her to take the teachings very seriously. This is her explanation,

...so already the way am going to start my married life as a young woman is based on what I can see and what I cannot see what was said and what was not said. For me what they were not saying, I could see it also, they never literally said if you don't perform well you will be brought back and the *lobola* money will be brought back it will be a shame in the family, but I could hear it. And it said to me that I don't want to be the one who brings shame on the family so whatever it takes am going to make this work. So you get into marriage with that mindset that *I've got to make this work and if it shows any signs of failure the first person you question is yourself*. In fact reading between the lines, my husband is perfect, this is what they were not saying but which I could hear.

This shows that there is no mutuality in sex according to the *Imbusa* teachings. Thus, it is important that women be made aware that their sexual needs are as important as the husband's and that they do not have to live in a marriage being fearful of not satisfying the husband - which is tantamount to divorce or being sent back to be re-taught hence bringing shame on the family and *banacimbusa*. This also means that *Imbusa* should cater for both the wife and husband in its teachings.

5.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has proposed a framework for a life-giving *Imbusa* teaching that can lead to a life-affirming marriage. The focus was on the *banacimbusa* as central actors in the *Imbusa* initiation rite. Second, it proposed an alternative in the *Imbusa* pedagogy from a banking approach to a feminist liberatory approach. Finally, I have made some suggestions for an African feminist holistic sexual ethic. Sex is one aspect which is crucial to the *Imbusa* teachings. Within these two frameworks I have explained the need for mutual responsibility and participation in the marriage, and not allowing one to be more important to the marriage than the other.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6. Introduction

Generally, this study has shown that the *Imbusa* initiation rite has been used to set up women for subservience in marriage and constructs who women become in marriage. This study explored whether and how undergoing the *Imbusa* initiation rite has shaped the humanity and wellbeing of married women in the *Zambian* context. Using feminist cultural hermeneutics as a tool for exploring women's views and interpretations of *Imbusa*, the findings have shown that the treatment that they receive during the teachings in turn repeats itself into their marriages as well. Thus, the key research question of this study can be restated as follows:

How has undergoing the *Imbusa* initiation rite shaped the humanity and wellbeing of married women in the *Zambian* context?

This chapter will show how this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in this area as well as make suggestions for further study. It is divided into two sections as follows: the first section suggests the contribution this study has made to establishing new knowledge. The second section gives suggestions for further research. Below I begin by reviewing the thesis of the study.

6.1. Contribution to Establishing New Knowledge

The study has contributed to the establishing of new knowledge in various ways. I emphasise only the following explicit aspects:

First, the study applied an interdisciplinary approach to understanding *Imbusa* initiation rites among the Bemba as well as other ethnic groups of *Zambia*. The study used both African women's theological framework and social psychology theory as a lens through which to view the

construction of women's identities during the *Imbusa* initiation rite (see chapter one, 1.4). The focus within social psychological theory was on status construction theory. *Imbusa* is a social context where women's worldview of marriage is enforced and programmed. This means that married women's views of marriage are established in the *Imbusa* initiation rite and their identity as married women is shaped within this context. This status construction theory was used concurrently with African women's theologies in which African women theologians have revealed that not all aspects of African culture is liberating. Consequently, African culture is approached with caution and suspicion to identify the positive aspects and promote them while refuting the negative aspects as demonstrated in chapters one and four.

Second, by its very nature as an empirical research, interviewing the participants across the ethnic and education background living in Pietermaritzburg in order to hear their views of *Imbusa* has also contributed to the body of knowledge. This is because most often than not, scholars, anthropologists etc. believe initiation rites are for poor, uneducated, rural women who have no courage to question the teachings they receive. The study demonstrated that just as the uneducated, the educated Zambia married women are powerless when it comes to the *Imbusa* initiation rite. In that even though they may have questions they would like to ask, they can never ask, because they fear that it would be taken as arrogance by the *banacimbusa* (see chapter four).

6.2. Identifying the Gaps and Suggestions for Further Research

This study is not exhaustive and final. Many questions and suggestions for further research arise. Firstly, it would be vital to empirically research *banacimbusa's* thoughts on *Imbusa*; this is because *banacimbusa* are central to the *Imbusa* teachings (see chapter five, 5.1). Secondly, it would be important to undertake a comparative study between women who were taught by the church (Christian *banacimbusa*) and those who are taught by traditional *banacimbusa* because many Christians regard the traditional *Imbusa* teaching as pagan. This comparison will be significant in understanding the differences and new trends of the *Imbusa* teaching. It would be significant to analyse which form of *Imbusa* between the Christian and non-Christian is more open to issues of gender justice. Thirdly,

because currently *Imbusa* has become commercialised, especially in urban areas, the relevance and value of such teachings would be necessary to research. Previously, a mother organised *banacimbusa* who would teach her daughter. However, today if a daughter elopes, she can find and pay her own *banacimbusa* to teach her. This does not fit with a culture that believes *umulilo ucingilile abakalamba taocha*, a fire that is made by elders does not burn. In order to make a living, some *banacimbusa* teach in schools on weekends, where there is a possibility that even high school children can buy the tickets and listen to these teachings that they should obtain at an older age. The questions remain: how valuable are the commercialised teachings? Are they life-affirming? And lastly, it would be interesting to hear from women in diaspora if, whether and how they are using imbusa teachings in their own marriages.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF ZAMBIAN MARRIED WOMEN PARTICIPANTS

Name	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
Juliet	20 th September, 2012	At her home
Lucy	21 st September, 2012	At UKZN
Barbra M	1 st October, 2012	At her home
Brenda P	24 th September, 2012	At her workplace
Patience	25 th September, 2012	At her home
Judy	23 rd September, 2012	At my home
Loveness	17 th September, 2012	At my home
Chilufya	26 th September, 2012	At my home
Priscilla	23 rd September, 2012	At her Church
Shula	2 nd October, 2012	At her home.

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Dear prospective participant:

I am Mutale M. Kaunda, currently pursuing Master of Theology (MTh) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. I am working on the topic: *A Search for a Life-Giving Marriage: The Imbusa Initiation Rite as Space for Constructing Wellbeing among Married Bemba Women of Zambia*

My area of focus is Gender and Religion with a specific interest on how Christian faith and African heritage can engage in dialogue in order to enrich each other for the purpose of developing African Christian communities into a safe space for both women and men.

In order to finish the degree, the university requires me to do a research and write a thesis based on the findings from the fieldwork. Therefore, I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in this research. The interview will be conducted between August and September and on the date you will see to be appropriate. Thus, the following are crucial for the success of this study. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study of which the focus is to explore how you, as a married Zambian woman, understand *Imbusa* teachings in preparing women for marriage. I am interested in knowing how you have responded to such teachings and the ways in which these teachings have shaped your experiences and wellbeing as a married woman. If you choose to volunteer for this study, I will ask you to participate in two to three interviews to discuss Zambian women's marriage experiences after the *Imbusa* teachings. The other aim of this interview is to find out whether women think the *Imbusa* teachings prepare them for partnership in marriage.

Interviews may vary in length: the in-depth, one-on-one interview could last approximately one to two hours. A focus group interview, if it will be arranged, will be attended by all study participants and could last approximately two hours. The interview and the focus group will be audio taped. I will provide you with a verbatim transcript of the interview as well as a copy of my interpretations of the focus group and one-on-one interview for your approval and/or corrections for accuracy at your request. At the completion of the study, you will receive a copy of the research findings at your request as well.

I want to assure you that I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. I am the sole collector of the data. All records will be destroyed following the completion of the study. Any specific information that could identify you, including your name, employment, etc. will be changed to give you anonymity. You may contact me with questions or concerns at any time before, during and after the study, and you are free to withdraw from the process at any time with no penalty.

I have enclosed two copies of the Consent Form. If you volunteer to participate in the study, please sign one copy and return to me and the other copy is for your records.

For more information or queries, you may contact:

Research Student: Mutale M Kaunda
PO Box 1009,
Pietermaritzburg 3201,
South Africa.
Mobile: +27836185514
E-mails: mutalemkaunda@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof. Sarojini Nadar
School of Religion and Theology,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Private Bag X01, Scottsville,
3209, Pietermaritzburg,
Emails: sarojini.nadar@gmail.com or nadars@ukzn.ac.za
Mobile: +27825707177

Agreement to participate:

I accept that the purpose of this study has been explained to me and that I fully understand what is expected of my participation. I therefore agree to participate in this study.

Yes No

(Please tick the correct one for you).

I give permission for my name to be mentioned in the thesis or in any further publication arising from this research.

Yes No

(Please tick the correct one for you).

Name of the participant

Signature of participant

Date

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FIFTEEN ZAMBIAN MARRIED WOMEN (QUESTIONNAIRE)

1. Please tell me your full names and age?
2. How long have you been married?
3. Please tell me your understanding of *Imbusa*?
4. Tell me about your *Imbusa* initiation ceremony experience?
5. Could you sing some of the *Imbusa* songs you still remember from your *Imbusa* teaching?
6. Why do you remember these songs?
7. What are the meanings of these songs?
8. What are the teachings (songs) in *Imbusa* that you would say empowered you for your marriage?
9. Are there some songs and teachings in *Imbusa* that you would say make women inferior to men? Why do you say so?
10. In what way would you say *Imbusa* teaching about husband and wife relationship shape/construct women for marriage?
11. Concerning sex in marriage, do you think women are prepared to enjoy or are they taught to give their husbands pleasure? Why?
12. Would you say that *Zambian* women are taught to negotiate for safe sex if they suspect their husband is having extra-marital affairs during *Imbusa* teachings? If yes, to what extent?
13. Do you suppose that the songs sung to teach women during *Imbusa* shape who they become in marriage and society? If yes, why? If not so, why?
14. How would you like *Imbusa* teaching be done?
15. Tell me one thing that you would like to see changed in *Imbusa* teachings?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences or ask me?

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT'S INVITATION LETTER

Study Title: “A Search for a Life-Giving Marriage: The *Imbusa* Initiation Rite as Space for Constructing Wellbeing among Married Bemba Women in Zambia.”

Principal Investigator: **Mutale Mulenga Kaunda (MTh)**

Dear Participant:

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study of which the focus is to explore how you, as a married Zambian woman, understand *Imbusa* teachings in preparation for marriage. I am also interested in knowing how you have responded to such teachings and the ways in which these teachings have shaped your experiences and wellbeing as a married woman.

If you choose to volunteer for this study, I will ask you to participate in two to three interviews to discuss Zambian women’s marriage experiences after the *Imbusa* teachings. The other aim of this interview is to find out whether women think the *Imbusa* teachings prepare them for partnership with their husbands.

Interviews may vary in length: the in-depth, face-to-face interview could last approximately one to two hours. A focus group interview, if it will be arranged, will be attended by all study participants and could last approximately two hours. The interview and the focus group will be audio taped. I will provide you with a verbatim transcript of the interview as well as a copy of my interpretations of the focus group and one-on-one interview for your approval and/or corrections for accuracy if you request for them. At the completion of the study, you will receive a copy of the research findings at your request as well.

Although I believe the risks associated with the interview process are minimal, I must inform you of the potential risk to you. Self-disclosure is an inherent part of the interview process. Reflecting on unpleasant experiences may evoke upsetting memories. You may fear that information you disclose to me may become public, causing you to experience backlash in your personal and professional life. I want to assure you that I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. I am the sole collector of the data. All tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the study. Any specific information that could identify you, including your name, employment, etc. will be changed to protect your anonymity. You may contact me with questions or concerns at any time before, during and after the study, and you are free to withdraw from the process at any time with no penalty.

As a married Bemba woman who has gone through the *Imbusa* teaching, I believe that the findings of this study will serve several beneficial purposes: to validate the lived experiences and wellbeing of Zambian married women as knowledge; to increase the knowledge of how *Imbusa* teachings have been a space where married women's wellbeing is constructed; to deepen the understanding of the ways of using *Imbusa* as a good space for empowering women in marriage; and, to inform *if/Imbusa* on how *Imbusa* practice can help women be able to empower themselves and others that go through the same initiation.

I have enclosed two copies of the Consent Form. If you volunteer to participate in the study, please sign one copy and return to me and the other copy is for your records.

My cell-phone number is +27836185514, and my email address is: mutalemkaunda@gmail.com if you would like to participate in this study or you would like more information.

Yours sincerely,

Mutale M Kaunda